

Confession

The Problem of Sin Part 3

1 John 1:8-9

Summary: The command to confess in order to be forgiven seems to conflict with justification. The only alternative to confession is denial – claiming to be free of guilt which is self deception and not being defined by truth about God and self; calling God a liar, and being separated from God’s Word (the purpose of which is joy and peace). Confession is the opposite – admitting to sin and sins and the sinful affections behind self-deception and having the truth in you. It must be heartfelt and public. Give glory to God!

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8 If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say, "We have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Introduction: The Problem of conditional forgiveness

We come this morning to a difficult and very controversial passage. The difficulty is mainly verse nine, which makes forgiveness conditioned upon ongoing confession. He says if we confess God will forgive, which implies He will not forgive if we fail to confess. How do you reconcile that with justification? From the moment you become a Christian, all your sin is credited to Jesus’ account and all Jesus’ perfect righteousness is credited to your account. So if you are a believer, God does not count your sins against you. And so if that is the case – if it is really true that God counts your faith as though it were righteousness, and there is zero condemnation for those who are in Christ, then why does John say that forgiveness is dependent upon our confessing our sins?

What happens if you don’t confess a particular sin? Do you lose your salvation? Or what happens if you never confess any sin at all? Is it possible to be saved and not confess your sin to God on a regular basis? Is this passage talking about a one-time act right at conversion only, or is it an ongoing, continuous thing we are to do?

And what exactly happened at the cross? Was our sin forgiven when Jesus paid the price on the cross, or was it just made forgivable? What exactly is forgiveness, and when does it take place?

Who is supposed to confess?

Before we can begin answering those questions or examining anything else in this text the first order of business is to determine exactly who this passage is addressed to. John gives six statements that begin with “If we.” So the first thing we need to do is make sure we understand who “we” is.

It is amazing (and distressing) to me how fast and loose people are willing to play with the “we’s” in Scripture. Very often a Bible writer will say “we,” and if what follows does not fit someone’s theology they say, “This is talking about non-Christians, so it does not apply to us.” Many of you are probably familiar with Bob George – he is a very popular personality on Christian radio. Bob George is a counselor who definitely has a heart for helping people, and no doubt he is a really great guy in a lot of ways. However he has some very divergent views on theology. He teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to confess his sin to God. He says it is a denial of what took place on the cross. All your sin is already forgiven, and therefore to confess your sins in order for them to be forgiven cannot possibly be a good thing. When he gets to 1 John 1:9 he just says, “Oh, that’s written to non-Christians, not Christians.”¹

Let me ask you something – do we still believe that every word of Scripture is breathed out of the mouth of God? Are there any words in the Bible that are so small that we are at liberty to just change them to mean something other than what they originally meant? So are we all agreed that when John wrote the word “we” he really did mean “we” and not “they”? Are we all agreed that “we” is the right word here? The reason I make such a point about that is because if we take this “we” seriously, that answers the question of who 1 John 1 is talking about. It is talking about some group that John is a part of. It is talking about Christians.

Some people have tried to explain this away by calling it a “pastor’s we.” Sometimes pastors will say “we” when they really mean “you” in order to avoid being offensive. For example, a pastor might say, “We must stop all this gossiping that is taking place in this church,” when in reality he knows he is not part of the gossip chain. He does not mean “we” at all – he means “you.” But he does not want to sound too harsh, so he softens it by saying “we.”

There are four reasons why I think this “we” should not be taken as a pastor’s “we.” First, it is not a valid assumption that just because in our day pastors sometimes say “we” when they mean “you” that the Bible writers did the same thing. There is no passage anywhere in Scripture that you can point to and say, “There is a clear example of a “pastor’s we” that most scholars would agree is a “pastor’s we.”

Second, the reason for a “pastor’s we” is to soften what is being said so as to not offend anybody. Do you really think that is what John is doing? Anyone who thinks John is going out of his way to avoid offending the false teachers just has not read the book of First John. He calls them antichrists. When he confronts their lack of love he does so by calling them murderers. He calls them liars. He accuses them of not knowing God, not having fellowship with God, not remaining in God, not being born of God, and calling God a liar.

Then he says, “Please don’t take this the wrong way, no offense, but in addition to all that, you are of the Devil, you carry out wicked work, you are walking in darkness, your sins are not forgiven, you are not pure, you do not have eternal life, and you remain in death.” I don’t think John is worried about hurting their feelings.

A third reason why this cannot be a “we” that somehow refers only to non-Christians and not Christians is because of the context.

2:1 My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father-- Jesus Christ the righteous One. ² He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

¹ His view is incoherent, because since he believes the sins of unbelievers were all forgiven at the cross too. He teaches that hell is full of forgiven people.

That has to be referring to believers. The “we” there refers to John’s spiritual children and they are distinguished from the rest of the world.

And a fourth reason it can’t be a “pastor’s we” is because it would be extremely confusing to say “we” in a context where John’s whole purpose is to differentiate between those who are truly saved and those who are not. Throughout the book John is forcing the readers to decide – are they going to follow John and the Apostles or are they going to follow the false teachers? A major purpose, if not the main purpose of the entire book is to make that distinction, so there is no way John is going to confuse the issue by saying “we” when he is referring to the false teachers. John is laboring to try to help the readers understand which people are included in the people of God and which are excluded. And it is impossible for me to believe that right in the middle of all that he would say “we” when referring to the group that are excluded from the people of God. That would play right into the hands of the false teachers.

Are there some theological tensions that we need to resolve in this chapter? Yes. We need to figure out how what John is saying can be reconciled with what Paul teaches about justification. But writing off this chapter as applying to non-Christians is just simply not an option. All Scripture is God-breathed, and the Holy Spirit did not hiccup when He moved John to write “we” and not “they.”

And by the way, all the major commentaries on 1 John (I read about 15 of them in my preparation) agree that this has to be speaking about believers. However, they also all agree that in these “if” statements John is attacking the claims of the false teachers. That is how he introduces their false claims. So that brings up the question of why John did not say, “When they claim to have fellowship with God and yet walk in the darkness...” and “When they claim they have no sin...” etc. The fact that John says “If we” rather than “When they” makes these dramatic and gripping warnings. We, the ones who are not them – even we, if we walk in the darkness, we are not fellowshipers with God. The point is there is a danger that John’s readers will follow the false teachers. John is not so much concerned here to tell us that the false teachers are lost. His purpose here is to warn us what will happen if we follow them. If John or any other Christian, including you, follows their pattern of walking in the darkness then you have no fellowship with God. And if you follow their pattern about claiming to be without sin, you are a liar and you are calling God a liar. These are incredibly sobering warnings. We need to resist the temptation to soften them or divert them in any way. They are directed to believers and they are warning against the most drastic consequence – no fellowship with God. And if we cannot find a way to fit that into our theology we need to adjust our theology, not the text of 1 John 1.

The Alternative to Confession

So, should we as Christians be confessing our sins? The question I would like to ask Bob George is this – if we are not to confess our sins, what is the alternative? Even if there were nothing at all anywhere in the Bible telling us to confess our sins to God – if each of the passages like 1 John 1:9 that talk about confession were just white space in the Bible, then what? If it is wrong for me to confess my sin to God, what should I do when I sin - lie about it to God? Should I claim that it was not really sin or that it was not really all that bad? Should I be dishonest or speak about the sin in some way other than the way Scripture speaks about sin? Or how about this – should I just not bring it up at all when I talk to God in prayer? Are some things out of bounds to discuss with God? Is it possible that I am not allowed to talk to God about something that is the most dangerous, destructive, threat in my life? Of course not!

If you want to know what the alternative to confession of sin is, just look at what John says in verses eight and ten.

8 If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say, "We have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

The only alternative to confession of sin is denial of sin, and that is a blasphemous lie. Failing to face the truth about your sin is part of what it means to walk in the darkness. How can I claim to be walking in the light if I keep my sin in the dark?

Denial of sin

Remember, in each of these pairs of “if’s” John first describes the wrong way, then the right way. “If we walk in the darkness...” (that’s the wrong way); “If we walk in the light...” (that’s the opposite – the right way) “If we say we have no sin...” (that’s the wrong way); “If we confess our sins...” (that’s the opposite – the right way)

The opposite of confession of sin is denial of sin, and there are two ways the readers were being tempted to do that.

Claiming to be free of guilt

8 If we say, "We have no sin,"

The phrase “to have sin” appears four times in John’s gospel, and each time it means to be guilty of sin.

John 9:41 "If you were blind," Jesus told them, "you wouldn't have sin. But now that you say, 'We see'-- your sin remains.

Jesus’ point is, “The fact that you are sinning against knowledge means you are guilty.”

John 15:22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin.

So there “having sin” is the opposite of having an excuse. Not having an excuse means you are guilty.

John 15:24 If I had not done the works among them that no one else has done, they would not have sin. Now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father.

And in John.19:11 when Jesus stated that Judas had greater guilt than Pilate, He used this same phrase – to *have* sin. So in John’s lingo, having sin refers to the guilt of sin.

The false teachers probably were not claiming to be perfect. Our folly and evil are so absolutely obvious and undeniable that not many people are so detached from reality that they would claim perfection. However, the guilt of sin is a hard thing to live with, and people work really hard to come up with some kind of rationale that frees them from that guilt. “I’m not as bad as.....”; “I made up for my sin by doing extra good things.”; “I made up for my sin through being committed to religion”; “My sins really are not all that bad”; “God is the type to overlook the kinds of sins I commit”; “I am getting better”; “My sins are not really my fault. I do them because of my upbringing/health/whatever”; “I can’t do anything about it anyway so I might as well not think about it”; “To err is human”; “It’s the way God made me. I can’t overcome human nature, so it’s not my fault”; “I make mistakes, but they aren’t really sins.” There is no end to the rationalizations people come up with to convince themselves that their guilt problem is taken care of. They do not need cleansing, they do not need to seek any special forgiveness, their sin situation does not need any attention. And when we do that, John says... we are deceiving ourselves.

Self-deception

Self-deception is a fascinating thing. When you deceive yourself, you are both the one doing the deceiving and the one being deceived. Inside your heart there are some good parts of you and some bad parts. And the bad part argues with the good part. That is why throughout Scripture (as well as in our own experience) we see that there is a constant dialogue that goes on between you and ... you. The Psalmists talk to their own soul.

Psalm 42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? ... Put your hope in God,

Psalm 57:8 Awake, my soul!

Psalm 62:5 Find rest, O my soul, in God alone

Psalm 103:2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits

(In that passage he keeps talking to his soul for five verses.)

Romans 7:15-25 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

There's "I" and then there's "I" and they are going in opposite directions.

As a Christian there is a bad part of you that desires sin and a good part of you that hates sin. And that part of you that loves sin is always trying to deceive that part of you that loves God. And numerous times Scripture commands us, "Do not be deceived."² Which means, being deceived is a choice. When the bad part of you is able to trick the good part of you, it is always because the good part of you was willing to be tricked. (Which means even the good part of you has plenty of bad in it.)

It is scary to read about self-deception in Scripture, because if it is possible to be self-deceived, how could you possibly know that you are self-deceived? If you knew that your beliefs were false, then you would not be deceived. So it would seem like self-deception would be impossible to recover from. I have had people tell me that I was self-deceived, and the only way out for me would be to believe the things they were telling me even though I was fully convinced in my heart that those things were not true. Is that the solution to self-deception? No! There is never, ever a time when you should accept something that you do not think is true just because some fallible person told you to accept it. Unless you can see something for yourself in Scripture do not ever believe it.

Self-deception is not something that is impossible to recover from. Self-deception happens when you want to believe some false thing more than you want to know the truth. So the solution is to have a willingness to face the truth. When you have that God will show you the way out of your self-deception.

John 7:17 If anyone desires to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

Deception comes when there is unwillingness to accept the truth. But once you become willing to accept the truth – whatever it may be, then God will enable you to see it. God will never leave you in a condition in which it is impossible for you to follow Him.

Nevertheless, there is a danger of self-deception. It is possible to deceive yourself into thinking you are not guilty before God when you sin. And if that happens, you are culpable before God, because the reason the bad part of you was able to convince the good part of you was because deep down it is what you really wanted to believe.

² 1 Cor.6:9, 15:33, Gal.6:7, Jas.1:16.

Truth not in us

Then John adds one of those remarks that at first sounds like a redundancy.

8 ...and the truth is not in us.

Not only are you deceived, but the truth is not in you. Is that just two ways of saying exactly the same thing, or is John adding something here? I think he is adding something.

For John, the word “truth” and the word “in” are both very significant. When John talks about truth he means more than just accurate information. For John truth is something that touches on every part of life. It has to do not only with your thoughts, but also your feelings, your beliefs, your speech, and your actions. It includes not only believing the right things, but also feeling and wanting and doing the right things. It includes not only truth about God but also truth about yourself, not only sound doctrine, but also genuineness, transparency and integrity in the way you live. It is walking in the light.

And the word “in” is also significant. When John talks about being in some abstract thing – like being in the light or in God or in the truth, that points to the closest possible relationship with that thing, such that it is a dominant, controlling, defining factor of your life. So if the truth is not in you, then the light of Christ (sound doctrine, integrity, genuineness, right feelings, right beliefs, right thoughts, right actions,) are not dominant, controlling, defining factors in your life.

The claim to be free from sins

10 If we say, "We have not sinned"

It also could be translated, “If we say we have not been sinning...” In verse eight John talks about sin in general, and here in verse ten it is in the plural – talking about individual sins. In verse eight it is in the present tense – pointing to an ongoing thing; here it is the perfect tense – pointing to past actions. If someone wants to try to get around verse eight by saying, “I used to sin, but I don’t anymore,” or “I still sometimes slip up and commit a sin, but the sin nature within me is eradicated,” or whatever claim they want to make – nothing can get past John’s language here. No matter how you slice it, there is no sense in which you can ever deny the reality of the problem of sin in your life.

When it came to sin, the false teachers of John’s day were evidently teaching something similar to what Christian Science teaches. Christian Science is a false religion that teaches that you conquer sin by denying that it exists.³ Some of the early Gnostic teaching of the time held that the only thing that really mattered was your spirit, not your body, so nothing your body does can really affect your spirit. So once you have reached enlightenment, none of the things your body does has any negative effect on your spirit. But John says any denial of the reality of your own sin and guilt is not only self-deception, and a separation from the truth and light, but in verse ten he even takes it a step further.

Calling God a liar

10 ...we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

To make God a liar means to call Him a liar. For one thing God has said many times in His Word that we are all sinners. But beyond that – everything God has ever said to us He has said from the perspective of a Judge and a Redeemer speaking to sinful, guilty creatures. Therefore if we are not sinful, guilty creatures, then the entire Bible is a lie. If that is the case, then God lied in Genesis when He described the fall. He lied in Exodus when He gave the picture of salvation from sin. He lied in Leviticus through Deuteronomy when He gave the sacrificial system as a picture of atonement for sin. The prophets

³ M.B. Eddy, *Science and Health* ch.2 23:1-6.

all lied, the Psalms are all lies, Jesus' entire ministry was a lie, the Apostles wrote nothing but lies, and the biggest lie of all was the cross. When we rationalize our sin so that we make our guilt disappear, we commit blasphemy of galactic proportions.

His Word is not in us

So obviously if you downplay or deny your sin, His word is not in you.

10 ...we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

The entire Bible, front to back, deals with us as sinners and God as Savior and Redeemer. So if you approach the Bible as a non-sinner you will understand nothing in the Bible. And you can never know God because He is a God who deals only with sinners. The promises of Scripture are for repentant sinners. The hope of God's Word is for repentant sinners. If you don't have a sin problem there is nothing in there for you. God has nothing to offer you, because He is the Great Physician, and those who are not sick have no need for a doctor. Jesus did not come into this world to seek and save those who are just fine – He only came to seek and save the lost.

Now, most of us are not tempted to deny our guilt altogether. But we are tempted to do it in certain, select circumstances. That bad part of us that wants to argue that we are not really guilty never shuts up. It has a motor mouth that goes constantly. And we are forever having to deal with the temptation to rationalize individual sins. "That cutting remark to my husband wasn't really sin. I wasn't being disrespectful – I am just tired." "My lack of romantic interest in my wife isn't really sin – it's her fault for letting herself go in her appearance." "I'm not really angry – just frustrated." "I'm not looking with lust – just enjoying God's creation." "The time and money I spend on worthless things isn't a sign of any wrong affections – I'm not as bad as some people." "My worry isn't really sin – it is legitimate concern." "Yelling at my kids in anger isn't sin – they need to learn discipline." "That conversation was not really gossip, because, well, it just wasn't gossip." (Sometimes the argument doesn't even have to be all that persuasive for us to fall for it. When you want to believe something, you are easily convinced.)

And the more you do that sort of thing, the less God's Word is in you. The more you rationalize sin the less God's Word functions as the dominant, controlling, defining factor of your life. Which means, when we are not honest about our sin we cut ourselves off from communication from God and the benefits of His Word.

The purpose of God's Word - joy

Do you know why God gave us His Word?

Isaiah 55:10-13 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

What is that purpose, God? What is this amazing, wonderful thing that is absolutely certain to take place once Your Word has gone out? What is the intended effect that is guaranteed?

¹² You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace

Peace and joy – that is the intended purpose and guaranteed outcome of the receiving of God's Word. So when we rationalize sin and guilt, we distance ourselves from God's Word and we cut ourselves off from the joy and peace that His Word is intended to bring us.

The meaning of confession

The only alternative to denial

So denial of sin and guilt is the wrong way. Let's take a look at the right way.

9 If we confess our sins

That is the right way. There should not be any controversy about this. There are only two options when it comes to your sin – deny it or confess it. Lie about it or be truthful about it. Now, to be fair to Bob George, I do not think he is advocating that we deny the reality of our sin. But if he thought it through and read the chapter carefully, he would see that that is the only other alternative. If sin is a reality in our lives, then the only two options are to deny it or confess it. You can live as though it were not a reality – that is walking in the darkness. Or you can live as though everything God said about your sin is true – that is walking in the light. If that is all it said there probably would not be much controversy. The problem comes with the next phrase.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins

The meaning of confession

What does John mean by confession? That is not hard to figure out in a general way. Verse nine is the opposite of verses eight and ten, right? If the wrong way is denying sin, the kind of confession John is calling us to must be the opposite of that.

1. *Admitting to sin in your life in general*
2. *Admitting to specific sins*
3. *Admitting to the sinful desires behind self-deception*

It means dealing with the problem of self-deception, and wanting to believe that you are not guilty. (Those times when you ask yourself, “Why do I fall for such stupid rationalizations?” The reason is not because you are dumb. It is because there is something in you that wants to fall for them. Part of confession is facing up to that.)

4. *Having the truth in you*

Confession is the opposite of not having the truth in you, so true confession means having the truth in you. Integrity, genuineness, right feelings, right beliefs, right thoughts, right actions, and the truth of Scripture: all that is embraced by your heart, and that is the dominant, controlling, defining factor of your life.

Must be heartfelt

In other words, accept the truth about God and the truth about yourself. If you go through the motions of mouthing the words “Yes, I sinned. I did wrong,” but they are all just words – that is not true confession. Confession has to be a true expression of your whole heart. Luther had a great statement about that – he said God does not forgive imaginary sin, nor does He save imaginary sinners. When you confess your guilt before God, if you are just mouthing words about your guilt but there is no sorrow or brokenness or real, genuine belief that you are actually guilty, the truth is not in you and you are calling God a liar. Your confession has to touch your whole being – including your affections.

Confess to Whom?

We need to consider the question of to whom we are to confess our sins. At first that may seem obvious – confess them to God. But it is not quite that simple.

In the immediate context, as well as throughout the book, the fellowship with God that we have is inseparably tied to fellowship with one another. I think we would all know what John would say if you asked him, “Is it possible to walk in the light with God and in the darkness with each other?” No, it is not. We do not confess every detail of every sin to everyone in the Church, but there is definitely a public aspect to confession.

John always uses the word “confess” to refer to a public statement – never a mere inner attitude. He uses the term fairly frequently, and every time it refers to declaring something publicly. In fact, in John 12 confessing is the opposite of keeping something inside.

John 12:42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue

They believed on the inside but would not confess it. So there “confess” means to make it public. Public confession of sin was a part of Jewish worship and had been for centuries. God commanded it on the Day of Atonement, when Aaron was to confess the sins of the people. And even in the course of daily life:

Leviticus 5:5 "When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned

Every time confession of sin is mentioned in the NT it is always confession before people: in Mt.3:6 and Mk.1:15, where the people confessed their sins before being baptized by John, in James 5:16 where confession is also linked to forgiveness of sin, and in Acts 19:18 where the people burned their pagan paraphernalia and confessed their sins. In each case the confession was always public. And so it is very unlikely, in my estimation, that the readers of 1 John would read this and assume John was talking about mere private confession in your heart to God only.

And besides all that, doesn't simple logic require that we confess our sins to one another if we are going to have genuine fellowship with one another? We should pray for one another in the church, right? So if we are going to pray for you, shouldn't we be praying for the greatest concerns in your life? If there is some disaster or calamity in your life, shouldn't we pray for you regarding that? And isn't it true that the greatest disaster and worst calamity in your life is your sin? And of all the sins you commit, isn't it usually the ones that you are most reluctant to confess that are the biggest calamity in your life? What kind of farce do we turn the fellowship into when one of us is struggling with a huge calamity and we are praying about the relatively trivial things in his life? If you cannot get a grip on your temper, and you are abusing your wife or children, and we are sitting around praying for you to get over your cold – that is ridiculous. If you are in bondage to alcohol or some drug or sexual sin or some other thing that is destroying your life, and that is the main threat to your walk with the Lord, and you have us praying for some ancillary thing - that is evidence that either you are not really serious about overcoming that sin, or you do not believe what God has said about the effectiveness of the prayers of the saints. Any time avoidance of embarrassment is more important to you than holiness you know you are not really repentant.

James 5:16 confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude

The restoration and healing that comes when we have sinned comes from God through the prayers of the folks at church. If we are not honest with one another about our sin, how is everyone else supposed to bring you back when you start to wander? If you have not established a lifestyle of openness and confession during the time you are strong, I promise you are not going to suddenly start when you begin to drift from God.

Proverbs 28:13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

And there is no reason to try to hide your sin anyway, because eventually it is going to be exposed.

Numbers 32:23 you may be sure that your sin will find you out.

When we refuse to confess our sins we are showing that we do not really believe Numbers 32:23 and the other passages that tell us that the truth is going to come out eventually. The Church plays no role in absolution or chastisement or punishment. But we do play a role in restoration, strengthening, support, compassion, encouragement, instruction, love, and prayer. There should be at least one person in the church who knows your deepest struggles and most private sins, and it should be someone who can help you. It should be a Galatians 6:1 type.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught by a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

It should be someone who will restore you gently and part of restoration is helping you take the sin seriously. You do not want someone who just says, “Hey, don’t sweat it. The stuff I do is ten times worse than that.” You need someone who will help you take your sin seriously and show you the way to repentance. But also someone who will be compassionate and never look down on you, but who will understand that you fail in the areas where you struggle for the same reason they fail in the areas they struggle. It should be a person who will be committed to pray earnestly for you, and who is skilled enough with the Scriptures to help encourage you and strengthen you in the warfare – and someone who will also be open with you about their struggles. And if you say, “I don’t have anyone like that” – yes, you do – your small group leader. There are probably several people in your small group who could do that and who would be willing. But at the very least your small group leader could do it. And I can assure you that anyone in leadership here at Agape – all the advisors – are people you could trust to share private things, and who could help you and who would pray for you.

Conclusion: Give glory to God!

Joshua knew that Achen was the one who had sinned. Before Achen was put to death Joshua called him to confess publicly first. And he did so by saying, “Give glory to God.” (Josh. 1:19) Confession glorifies God, because it shows His indictment and punishment to be just. It was not enough that everyone knew that Achen had committed a sin – he had to publicly confess it with his own mouth.

On Judgment Day every tongue will give glory to God. Every mouth will not only confess Jesus is Lord, but will also have to acknowledge the truth of what Jesus is saying when He pronounces the punishment for every last one of their sins. It will all be exposed, and every mouth will give glory to God by acknowledging that the hell they are about to be cast into forever is a just punishment and is indeed exactly what they deserve. But for us, we can give glory to God in a different way. We can confess our sins now. And even though there is pain and sorrow and humiliation that comes with exposure, there is the joy of forgiveness and cleansing that is far greater. Let us confess our sins to God and to one another.

Let us peel back all the facades and phoniness and give glory to God. Let us walk in the light so that the defining factor of our lives is the truth about God and about our selves. Let us let His Word dwell in us so that we might go out with joy and be led forth in peace.

Benediction: Eph.1:3-7 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins

Devotionals

Confession – God’s great compassion

1 John 1:8-10 Day 1

Psalm 51:1,2 A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had come to Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

David appealed to God’s mercy, love and compassion before even mentioning his sin. His sights are fixed on God’s nature. Oh, what a beautiful and welcome sight is the Lord’s mercy to the broken sinner!

Break me, dear Lord, over my sin that I might take maximum delight in Your mercy. Don’t let me presume upon it, dear Lord. Let me see it as a priceless treasure that I desire with my entire being, so that when I receive it, I am filled with joy.

God’s forgiveness is a function of His compassion. He is motivated to show mercy because He feels compassion inside His heart for you. Your sin offends, angers, and repulses God; but it also generates real compassion in His heart as He sees the horrible disease with which you have infected yourself. God actually feels sorry for you because of your plight of having to be the object of His displeasure!

Lord God, I love Your compassion. Thank You. Make me like You. Make me a conduit of that compassion, that I might feel that way toward other sinners. Let all my anger over other people’s sin fuel my compassion for them. And convict me, dear Lord, if I ever fail to have compassion on someone who sins.

David appeals to God’s *great* compassion. His love and mercy and compassion are so vast, so deep, so high, so wide - though your sins outnumber the hairs on your head, His mercy outnumbers the stars in the sky. It is vast both in quality and quantity. He shows mercy over and over and over as we keep repeating our sins. And the depth of His compassion reaches far beneath even the lowest and most base of our sinful motives and rises far above even the highest, most prolific evils.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God of unfathomable mercy and compassion on the penitent sinner

Promise to trust: He will cleanse me

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Restoration, A sense of being attended to and cared for, delight in God’s mercy and compassion, and gratitude

Confession – Thorough Cleansing

1 John 1:8-10 Day 2

Psalm 51:3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

When referring to his sin, David alternates between the plural and singular. He sees the great mass of frequent, individual acts of sin; and he also sees it all as one grim unity. Our sins flow from sin living in us. Often we know our sins but not our sin. We do some sinful act, confess it, resolve not to repeat it, and act as though that act was all there were – forgetting about the tree that produced that fruit. So often we have the attitude that says, “My sin is past, today is a new day, I will try to do better today” and we do not have a sense of lingering filthiness that needs to be remedied. There should be grief in our hearts over indwelling sin that has lodged itself within us and which is so much a part of us.

How massive is our guilt before God!

Psalm 51:5 Behold! I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me.

We are shot through with sin at a level that is not at all superficial. It goes back to the core of who we are. It was in our spiritual DNA from the very start. It is a virus that has infected every cell of our being.

It is only when we understand how pervasive and deep is our problem that we will cry out to God for thorough cleansing. Our individual acts of sin point to a problem that is deep and systemic. When David wrote this psalm, his sin with Bathsheba was long past – the child was already born. It could have been a year or more later. And still he is asking for cleansing. Perhaps David had never even confessed the sin to God prior to Nathan’s rebuke (Ps.32). But still, he refers to his sin in the present, not the past. And he prays for cleansing from all his iniquity. It is as though this sin with Bathsheba served to show him the mountain of his sin, of which the adultery was just one falling stone.

Show me the mountain of my sin, Holy God. Show me the enormity of the pile of manure that I need to be cleansed of. I want to love much, Lord Jesus. Show me how much You are forgiving.

Nathan told David that his sin was cancelled, nevertheless the consequences were certain. David’s prayer was not to appeal the consequences; he just begged to be clean.

Psalm 51:1b,2,7 ...according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

David asks to be *thoroughly* washed. Sin is defiling. The Old Testament pictures associate sin with the most disgusting things there are – excrement, a decaying corpse, leprosy boils, and all the grossest, most sickening things there are. Sin is filthy to think of, filthy to talk about, filthy to desire, filthy to do. It is utterly detestable and offensive to God, and it contaminates your entire being.

David asks God to make him whiter than snow. Snow is already completely white. How could something be whiter than white? God makes us so pure that only hyperbole can describe it. David’s heart was the color of blood. He was guilty of inbred, congenital, constant sinfulness that permeated his whole being to the deepest core and that required hyssop (the cure for leprosy); and he was asking God to take him from that to a condition so completely pure his heart could only be described as whiter than bright, pure white.

Oh the power of Your blood, dear Lord Jesus! No dye could ever take a deep red cloth and make it white. Your blood can. It can make me like snow, which is not just white on the surface but that you can dig down as far as you want and it is just as white.

Lord, the dye of my sin is the most indelible there is, and I have laid in it for so long it has soaked into every part of me. I am filthy to the core of my being because of my sin, and need the deepest kind of cleansing. Scrub and scrub and scrub, dear Lord, until I am clean. And like David, teach me to long for true cleanness. Don't let me be content merely with clean clothes, like the hypocrite. Teach me to long for cleanness of heart. Open my eyes to the filthiness of sin. Let me be like the child who can't stand to have something on her hands, and insists that it be wiped off right away – rather than like the child who rolls around in the mud and has no sense of needing to be washed. Give me the sense of filthiness that is appropriate given how much I have defiled myself with sin. Show me how vile and filthy and loathsome is my sin, that I might long for deep cleansing.

Lord, make me clean. Above all, let me, like David, long for cleansing rather than merely relief from consequences.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who thoroughly cleanses the penitent

Promise to trust: He will make my heart whiter than snow

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gratitude, confidence, joy, repentance

Confession

1 John 1:8-10 Day 3

Psalm 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Our sins hurt other people to be sure, and we are responsible to seek their forgiveness. So in a very real way we have sinned against them. But ultimately what is sin but a violation of God's law? Sin against people is only sin *because* it is sin against God. That is the only thing that makes it evil. And the people we sin against are deserving of good treatment only because of God.

When our sin hurts other people deeply that helps us see the depth of the wickedness of it. The tears of our loved ones are like a visual aid that helps us understand the evil of our sin. But we must understand that the visual aid is just that and no more. It merely illustrates on a small scale what is true on a much larger scale. Our guilt is not limited to the damage we can see that we have done to people. As egregious as that is, our offence against God is far, far worse.

Most of the time we get it backwards: We feel worse about hurting people than about dishonoring God. Just think about your attitudes toward the two tables of God's Law. Table 1 (the first four of the ten commandments) have to do with sins directly against God. Table 2 (commandments 5-10) have to do with sins that involve people. What an indictment on our love for God that on days when we keep the second table while breaking the first, we feel we have had a pretty good day – without any great, scandalous sin. But when we violate the second table we have a great awareness of the evil. Think about it. If you were to commit murder or adultery or burglary or perjury, you would lay your head on the pillow at the end of the day racked with horrible guilt and sorrow. But on days when you place another god before the LORD by preferring some created thing to fellowship with Him, but you “keep your nose clean” in every other respect, is the sense of guilt less than when you commit the more “scandalous” sins of the second table?

Or think of it this way – which would be harder for you to confess to your small group: that you committed adultery or that you had idolatrous attitudes? How meager is our understanding of God's holiness!

One thing is for sure – when God does bring consequences they are utterly just. No one has ever been treated unfairly or unjustly by God.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who thoroughly cleanses the penitent

Promise to trust: He will make my heart whiter than snow

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gratitude, confidence, joy, repentance

Confession – seeking forgiveness

1 John 1:8-10 Day 4

Psalm 51:9- Turn Your face away from my sins and blot out all my guilt.

When we sin in some terrible way against God we feel awful about it for a while, but as time passes the pain lessens. Sometimes we even find ourselves looking forward to the passing of a few days so we will not feel the intensity of the pain as much. But the passing of a few days (or decades) does nothing about our sin – nothing at all. The only thing that happens is our memories fade. However time does nothing to God's memory. Nor does it affect His emotions. God has mercifully designed us such that painful emotions from memories tend to soften over time, but time does nothing to Him. He is not less angry or grieved over one of your sins just because it is now further in the past.

So the only thing that can soften the sting of the grief – the only thing that can relax the severity of God's anger over one of our sins is a deliberate action on God's part to turn His face away from looking at that sin (which would otherwise be ever before Him in living, vivid color), and to blot our guilt out of His mind. Apart from that, the extreme grief and anger that God experiences right during the moment when we are sinning against Him would remain that severe forever.

The fact that God's memory never fades means when He makes the decision to forgive and to turn His face away from our sin and blot it out and shower us with mercy: it is as though He were making that decision right in the middle of our committing the sin – that is how fresh it is in His mind. So often we forgive people only after the pain has faded some. But it never fades for God.

Thank You, dear Lord, for Your willingness to forgive! Thank you for blotting out my sin instead of blotting out my name from Your book!

David had already been pardoned. God sent Nathan to give authoritative assurance of that.

2 Samuel 12:13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin.

Yet David prays for forgiveness anyway. As our awareness of the severity of our sin increases so does the earnestness of our repentance. If a friend hurts you in a deep way and a small way, and confesses only the small way, even if you have forgiven him it is appropriate for him to confess again to you when he becomes aware of the deep way that he has hurt you. So it is with us and God.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who thoroughly cleanses the penitent

Promise to trust: He will make my heart whiter than snow

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Restoration, A sense of being attended to and cared for, Renewal and transformation, Desire to obey

Confession – the need for re-creation

1 John 1:8-10 Day 5

Psalm 51:10 God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Sin had so destroyed David that he had to call in none other than the Creator Himself. He had wreaked such devastation and destruction within himself that only One who can call a Universe into being by a single word is capable of the kind of restoration he needed. The same is true for us.

In our natural thinking it does not seem like sin does that much damage. It seems like our sin is just a slip-up, and all that is needed is for us to be more careful next time (as if sin were like a mere mistake). But the truth is, when we sin there is a bomb that detonates inside our soul and the devastation that results – especially the damage done to our affections – is staggering. After the detonation we desire God and His Word less, sin is more attractive, heaven seems like a distant, irrelevant mirage; righteousness loses its appeal, the world gets big and God gets small in our eyes. The city of our heart becomes so decimated that the only chance of restoration is the Creator Himself.

Help me remember, dear Lord, the damage I inflict upon myself when I sin. Create a new heart in me right now, dear Lord. I have set off multiple bombs in recent days. Create my heart anew this morning. Restore the image of You that I have so marred. Restore the ruined affections. Tear down fleshly, temporal fear and rebuild fear of You. Remove adulterous loves, and use Your powerful “let there be” to create faithful love for You alone in my heart. Wipe away reliance on worthless human wisdom and restore full confidence in Your wisdom alone. Oh blessed exchange! Love for love, wisdom for wisdom, affection for affection, fear for fear – in each case the worthless for the priceless. What an amazing thing that I can even ask for this! For free no less! You are such a rich, wealthy, generous, gracious God!

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who creates inner purity after I sin

Promise to trust: He will create a new heart and restore purity within me

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Restoration, A sense of being attended to and cared for, Renewal and transformation, Desire to obey