

Keys to Spiritual Growth

Confessing Our Sins

2 Peter 3:18

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Scripture

All Christians are in the process of spiritual growth regardless of how long we have been saved. Some Christians grow slowly; other Christians grow quickly. The desire of every Christian is to become more and more like his or her Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The master key to spiritual growth is the glory of God. Christians grow most when we are focused on living for God's glory. In this series of messages titled "Keys to Spiritual Growth" we are searching the Scriptures for practical ways to live for the glory of God and therefore to grow spiritually.

My foundational text for this series is 2 Peter 3:18:

¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Introduction

A minister was walking down the street when he came to a group of about a dozen boys between 10 and 12 years of age. The boys surrounded an old dog. Concerned that the boys were hurting the animal, the minister went over and asked, "What are you doing with that dog?"

One of the boys replied, "This dog is just an old stray. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home. So we've decided whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie gets to keep the dog."

The minister was taken aback.

"You boys shouldn't have a contest telling lies," he said. "Don't you know it's a sin to lie?"

¹ Much of the material for these sermons comes from Dr. John MacArthur.

Then he launched into a 10-minute sermon about lying. The minister ended his speech by saying, “When I was your age, I never told a lie.”

There was dead silence for a while and just as the minister was beginning to think he had got through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, “All right, give him the dog.”

Whether it is telling a lie, or struggling with pride, or giving in to anger, or toying with lust, or dabbling in pornography, or wasting resources, or dishonoring our parents, we all sin. And, in order to grow spiritually we need to learn how to confess our sins.

Lesson

So today, let’s look at another key that will help us glorify God and grow spiritually. And that key is confessing our sins.

Confessing our sins is an expression of humility and a major key to spiritual growth. But it is difficult to do. It’s hard to admit a mistake.

Once when Frederick II, an 18th century King of Prussia, went on an inspection tour of a Berlin prison, he was greeted with the cries of prisoners, who fell on their knees and protested their unjust imprisonment. While listening to these pleas of innocence, Frederick’s eye caught a solitary figure in the corner, a prisoner seemingly unconcerned with all the commotion.

“Why are you here?” Frederick asked him.

“Armed robbery, Your Majesty.”

“Were you guilty?” the King asked.

“Oh yes, indeed, Your Majesty. I entirely deserve my punishment.”

At that Frederick summoned the jailer.

“Release this guilty man at once,” he said. “I will not have him kept in this prison where he will corrupt all these other fine innocent people who occupy it!”

We are all prone to shift the responsibility for our sin away from ourselves and blame our circumstances, our environment, or

other people. In doing so we fail to glorify God, and we also fail to grow spiritually.

I. Confession of Sin Illustrated

Let's begin by illustrating confession of sin.
Let's look at two illustrations of this.

A. Achan

Achan in Joshua 7 shows how confession of sin glorifies God.

Moses had forfeited his right to enter the Promised Land by disobeying God at the rock (cf. Numbers 20:7-13). So Joshua led the children of Israel to their first great victory at Jericho (Joshua 6:1-21). Beforehand, he cautioned them not to take any spoils from the city (v. 18). He didn't want them to have any remnants of a pagan society in their possession. However, a man named Achan took some of the spoils from the city, and as a result Israel was defeated in their next battle at Ai (Joshua 7:1-5).

When Joshua found out about Achan's sin, he said to him, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me" (Joshua 7:19). Joshua told Achan to glorify God by confessing his sin.

Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done" (v. 20).

Verses 24-25 tell us that "Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge [i.e., all that he had taken], his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. Joshua said, 'Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today.' Then all Israel stoned him." Achan was punished even though he confessed his sin.

It is important to note that confession of sin doesn't eliminate chastening. For example, David also confessed his sin in Psalms 32 and 51, but that didn't eliminate the consequences for him.

After the Israelites stoned Achan and his family, "they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since" (vv. 25-26).

Achor means "trouble" in Hebrew. God was saying to Israel, "If you disobey me, there will be severe consequences." Achan and his family (evidently also implicated in the crime) were all put to death.

Why did Joshua want Achan to confess his sin? Because God would have looked like a cruel ogre if he had taken the life of that man and family without anyone knowing why he did so. When Achan confessed his sin, he was saying in effect, "God, you have every right to punish me because I deserve it."

That is one reason why confession brings glory to God. When God chastens us for our sin—which he must do because he is holy—he is seen to be fair in the eyes of others because we admit that we deserve his chastening.

Achan said, "I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel." He didn't blame God, his circumstances, or others but, rather, accepted the responsibility for his own sin.

B. The Thief on the Cross

The second illustration of confession of sin is the thief on the cross.

The thief who hung on a cross beside Jesus Christ had dishonored God his entire life. But in his last moments, he gave glory to God.

In Luke 23:41 he said to the other thief, "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve." The thief realized that God was righteous in his judgment.

Whenever we excuse our sin, we are blaming God. Adam did that when God questioned him about eating the forbidden fruit. He answered, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12). Adam did not accept responsibility for his sin but blamed God, who had given Eve to him.

Sin is never God’s fault, nor is it the fault of a person or circumstance that God brings into our lives. Excusing sin impugns God for something that is our fault alone. If he chooses to chasten us, it is because we deserve it.

Confession of sin is essential to spiritual growth. When you openly face the reality of your sin and confess it, you then have less dead weight to drag you down in the process of growth. Hebrews 12:1 says, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Our spiritual growth increases as the weight of sin drops off through confession.

II. Confession of Sin Described

Second, let me now describe confession of sin.

Confession of sin includes a number of elements.

A. Examining Ourselves

First, confession of sin begins with examining ourselves.

Psalm 66:18 says, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

We cannot even commune with God if we are harboring sin in our hearts, let alone grow spiritually.

So there must be a regular examination of our lives to see if we are cherishing sin in our hearts.

London held its breath in June 1987. While working on a building site, a construction foreman thought his workers had hit a

cast iron pipe while using a pile driver. After picking up and then dropping the huge object, they realized the pipe looked like a bomb. It was—a 2,200-pound World War II bomb, one of the largest the Germans dropped during the blitz which killed more than 15,000 Londoners. After evacuating the area, a 10-man bomb disposal unit worked 18 hours before deactivating the seven-foot device.

Unconfessed sin, like an unexploded bomb, can rest in the heart of an individual—or in a church. Unless it is deactivated through confession, it can detonate and cause great damage.

We should especially examine our hearts for unconfessed in the following two instances. First, we should especially examine ourselves in response to chastening.

We must be willing to accept God's chastening. Just as parents must chasten a child for misbehavior, God chastens us so that we don't repeat our mistakes. Often, chastening is an indication that we should examine our lives to see if we are cherishing some sin in our hearts.

I think of Jonah who sinned against the clear will of God. He ran away from the Lord and headed for Joppa in order to catch a ship bound for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). While at sea a terrible storm came up. Finally, Jonah realized that his sin was responsible for the terrible storm. He had the sailors throw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm (1:15).

And second, we should especially examine ourselves in response to guilt.

God has placed a system of guilt in us for our own good. Spiritual life without guilt would be like physical life without pain. Guilt is a defense mechanism; it is like a bell or buzzer that goes off when we sin in order to lead us to confession.

We can relieve that pain in our soul by confronting our sin and saying, "God, I know this is sin against you, and it is my fault. I don't want to do it again. Give me strength to walk another path."

That admission must be part of our lives before we can grow spiritually, for it acknowledges the sin that holds us back.

B. Taking Responsibility

Second, confession of sin includes taking responsibility.

As long as you are making excuses for your sin, you will never grow spiritually.

In Chuck Colson's book, *Born Again*, which is about his conversion and experiences during Watergate, Colson shares one of President Nixon's problems: he could never admit he was wrong about anything. In fact, Colson said that even when Nixon obviously had a cold—nose running, red face, sneezing, all the symptoms of a cold—he would never admit it.

For your life to have a decreasing frequency of sin, which is necessary for growth, you must acknowledge your responsibility. Don't blame your circumstances, your husband, your wife, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your boss, your employees, or your pastor. Don't even blame the devil. Your sin is your responsibility. Certainly anything or anyone can tempt you to sin, but sin ultimately occurs as an act of your will—and you are responsible for it.

There are many examples in Scripture of people taking responsibility for their own sin. Perhaps the best example is the Prodigal Son. When the Prodigal Son returned home to his loving father, he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Luke 15:21). He was even willing to be treated as a humble servant because he knew he didn't deserve anything (v. 19). That is the attitude of a person who takes responsibility for his sin.

Confession is acknowledging that your sin is your own responsibility—and not anyone else's.

C. Taking Sin Seriously

Third, confession of sin includes taking sin seriously.

Confession acknowledges that wrong actions are sin, which is an affront to God's holy nature.

Luke 18:13 is a wonderful example of the tax collector taking his sin seriously. Jesus said, “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

In a painfully honest look at his own life, W. E. Sangster wrote in his journal that although he was a minister of the Gospel, the spiritual passion in his private life had languished. He was not taking sin seriously. He made the following observations:

- I am irritable and easily put out.
- I am impatient with my wife and children.
- I am deceitful in that I often express private annoyance when a caller is announced and simulate pleasure when I actually greet them.
- From an examination of my heart, I conclude that most of my study has been crudely ambitious; that I wanted degrees more than knowledge and praise rather than equipment for service.
- Even in my preaching I fear that I am more often wondering what the people think of me, than what they think about my Lord and his word.
- I have long felt in a vague way, that something was hindering the effectiveness of my ministry and I must conclude that the “something” is my failure in living the truly Christian life.
- I am driven in pain to conclude that the girl who has lived as a maid in my house for more than three years has not felt drawn to the Christian life because of me.
- I find slight envies in my heart at the greater success of other young ministers. I seem to match myself with them in thought and am vaguely jealous when they attract more notice than I do.

Confession means taking sin seriously. It is being brutally honest with yourself, and not whitewashing that which needs radical surgery. Confession involves recognizing that sin is your responsibility, and that it is sin.

That understanding is basic to spiritual growth because you are dealing with something that can retard the process.

D. Agreeing with God

Fourth, confession of sin includes agreeing with God.

The Greek word translated as “confess” is *homologeō*. *Logeo* means “to speak” and *homo* means “the same,” as in homogeneous. So *homologeō* means “to speak the same.” Confessing your sin is saying the same thing about your sin that God says about it.

1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” First John was written to define the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian, and verse 9 says confession of sin characterizes a Christian.

Verse 10 says, “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” Non-Christians may deny their sin, but Christians confess it. A true Christian recognizes sin and accepts responsibility for it, takes it seriously, and agrees with God that it is indeed sin.

Confession of sin doesn’t take place only at conversion. It continues, as faith does, throughout the life of every Christian. A pattern of confessing sin characterizes the life of every Christian.

Agreeing with God means that we recognize the full severity of our sin. We do not try to water it down or minimize it, like the man who wrote the following letter to the IRS:

Gentlemen:

Enclosed you will find a check for \$150. I cheated on my income tax return last year and have not been able to sleep ever since. If I still have trouble sleeping, I will send you the rest.

Sincerely,

A Tax Payer

Of course there are varying degrees of confession—sometimes we don’t make as full a confession as we should—but a

true Christian sooner or later acknowledges his sin, agrees with God that it is indeed sin, and makes a full confession of his sin.

E. Repenting of Our Sin

Finally, confession of sin involves repenting of our sin.

Many times we don't confess our sin because we're not ready to let go of it. There is no such thing as true confession without repentance.

There was a cartoon several years ago in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in which little George Washington was standing with an ax in his hand. Lying on the ground before him was the famous cherry tree. He had already made his smug admission that he did it—after all, he “cannot tell a lie.” But his father was standing there exasperated, saying, “All right, so you admit it! You always admit it! The question is: when are you going to stop doing it?”

We betray a lack of spiritual maturity when we want to eliminate the penalty of sin but retain the pleasure of sin. For confession to be genuine, we must turn from our sins in repentance.

Conclusion

Confessing our sins is one of the keys to glorifying God and spiritual growth. Ask yourself:

- Am I examining my life regularly to see if there is any sin in my life?
- Am I taking responsibility for my sin?
- Am I taking sin seriously?
- Do I agree with God that my sin is in fact sin?
- Am I repenting of my sin?

Let us confess our sins so that we can glorify God and grow spiritually. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you that one of the keys to spiritual growth is confessing our sins. How we thank you that you have provided a remedy for all of our sin in the person and work of your Son, Jesus Christ. We thank you for his life, we thank you for his death, we thank you for his resurrection, and we thank you for his present session at your right hand.

Oh Father, if there is anyone here today who is not yet a Christian, would you grant that person the gift of faith and repentance. Enable that person to trust in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life, as well as to turn from all known sin.

And help every one of us to live in such a way that we regularly and routinely confess our sins.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name, to whom be glory both now and forever! Amen.

CHARGE:

May God help each one of us to grow spiritually. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.