

Justification #22:
The Problem of Ongoing Sin #3

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Justification
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The following sermon was delivered on Sunday morning, August 19th, 2007 at Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, New Jersey.

I want you to imagine with you me this morning that you are present with me at a gathering of evangelical ministers and church leaders. The leadership of that particular gathering has called for a discussion period and the question that is set before this group of evangelical ministers and Christian leaders is this. Tell us what you think would be the 10 most effective ways to empty a church in one year. Let's discuss together the 10 most effective ways to empty a church in one year.

Well, to the extent that the representatives of that group of evangelical ministers and Christian leaders have bought into what is called the user friendly approach to church and to church growth, surely one of the 10 ways that would be mentioned by which to empty a church in one year would be to preach 22 sermons on the weighty doctrine of justification by faith.

Yes. There would be those who say, "You want to empty your church? Do that."

Dare to think that there are people who would sit Sunday after Sunday after Sunday for 22 Lord's Days and give their minds to an hour of closely reasoned, careful exposition and application of the weighty doctrine of justification.

However, believing that this doctrine is, indeed, as Luther and the Reformers asserted, the central article of the standing or falling church and believing that justification by faith is at the very nerve centers of the gospel of the grace of God, I have had the temerity to preach 21 sermons on this weighty doctrine and, God willing this morning, I will preach sermon number 22. And I do so without apology. I do so without embarrassment.

I began the series by highlighting its great importance and then by demonstrating the biblical context of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. And then for a number of weeks I sought to open up the substance of this doctrine out of the Scriptures using the definition of the Larger Catechism as my teaching and preaching outline.

What is justification? Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners wherein in he pardons all of their sins and accepts and accounts their persons as righteous in his sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ by God, imputed to them and received by faith alone.

And with that definition as our teaching framework we opened up a number of Scriptures demonstrating that this historic, evangelical, biblical, protestant, confessional understanding of the doctrine of justification is, indeed, the teaching of the Word of God.

Now, having expounded the heart of this amazing provision of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, I am now attempting to consider with you some of the very real practical and pastoral issues inseparably related to the biblical doctrine of justification. The first of these issues was that of the apparent contradiction between the teaching of the apostle Paul and that of the book of James, the brother of our Lord. We saw that Paul's primary, though not exclusive emphasis is upon the fact that the sole means of receiving this wonderful blessing of justification is faith. Faith alone lays hold of this provision of God's grace.

On the other hand, the primary, though not exclusive emphasis of James is the fact that the faith which truly lays hold of Christ and his righteousness will never be alone. It is not a dead faith or a faith akin to that of the demons, but it is the faith which is the gift of God unto righteousness in Jesus Christ, a faith that is always productive of a transformed life.

Then the second issue of great pastoral concern growing out of the exposition of the biblical doctrine of justification is that which I have identified in this way: justification and the problem of ongoing sin in the life of the justified. It is this very crucial matter that we are now wrestling with. This is the their message in which we are addressing it.

What have we seen thus far?

Well, I began with heading number one: The problem identified. And I stated that this problem is rooted and grows out of two realities which face all of those who are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Number one, the reality of the nature of God's justifying act and, secondly, the reality of the presence of sin in each and every justified sinner. Those are two realities which when taken seriously and viewed with biblical accuracy create a problem. If, in the court of heaven all the demands of the law with respect to my sin have been satisfied, Christ has borne the punishment that they deserve, Christ has fulfilled all the righteousness of the law on behalf of his people, what concern need I have with sin? Christ has dealt with all of it in terms of its judicial implications.

But on the other hand I know that I sin. And when my conscious affirms that I have sinned, I am uncomfortable not doing something with it.

Well, how do I deal with that problem of remaining sin, of actual sin in such a way that does not in any way denigrate the wonder of God's justifying act on the one hand or so appreciate the wonder of my justification that I dishonor God by treating sin lightly when everything in the Bible says sin must never be treated lightly? This is a real problem if, if you take your justification seriously and take seriously the reality of your remaining sin.

But then, secondly, having identified the problem, I tried to set before you the problem wrongly managed or handled. Some make a wrong and potentially soul destroying use of the doctrine of justification and they actually take the position God sees no sin in me, God will never legally punish me for my sin, therefore I should not take seriously any struggles with sin, confession of sin, mortification of sin, watching and praying that I do not fall into sin. This has actually been the use that some have made of the doctrine of justification thinking that they honor this marvelous provision of grace by so doing.

But then the second wrong management of the problem is some make a wrong and sole weakening response to the reality of their remaining sin. They allow the reality of their remaining sin to keep them in a mournful, joyless state continually. They are constantly doubting their acceptance in the Beloved and they have a chronic problem of an internal preoccupation with their sins.

Well, having identified the problem, the problem wrongly managed, we began last Lord's Day to consider heading number three, the problem rightly managed or rightly handled. And I said the first and foundational principle in handling this problem aright is this. Sin in the justified sinner must always be recognized and dealt with as sin. Sin in a justified sinner must always be recognized and dealt with as sin.

When you and I sin—the angry word, the jealous spirit, the lustful thought, the untruthful word, the cold heart in worship, the resentful attitude to parents' rule and government—these things that are sin and because they are sin they must always be recognized and dealt with as sin. They constitute a violation of the law of God. They are an affront to the being of God and they are a provocation of the displeasure of God. Every sin you and I commit as justified believers is all three of these things: a violation of the law of God. We have failed at some point to love God supremely or to love our neighbor as ourselves. And this, in turn, has been an affront to the being of God himself and it has been a provocation of the displeasure of God.

I did not say the wrath of God, the judgment of God, but, as we will see in subsequent ministry, of the fatherly displeasure of God. And we must be clear in our understanding of the place of the moral law in the life of the justified if we are going to deal with our sin as sin. And so I sought to demonstrate and I want to, just by way of review, underscore these distinctions last Lord's Day.

Number one, the condemning power of the broken law has been exhausted in the death of Christ for me. Get hold of that. Savor it until it becomes part of the texture of your soul as a believer. The condemning power of the broken law has been exhausted in the death of Christ for me.

Galatians 3:10 says, “Cursed is everyone that continues not in every thing written in the law to do it.”

But Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us. For it is written ‘Cursed is everyone that hangs upon a tree.’”

Paul could say, “The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”

And you and I have not begun to enter in to the privilege of the justified state until we can look at our present sins as sin, as a violation of the law of God and yet say the condemning power of that broken law, the law that I have just broken when I blew my cork, the law of God that I have just broken by sinning through a hymn without one serious thought of God, not loving him in my praise with all my heart, mind, soul and strength, the condemning power of the law that I broke has been exhausted in the death of Christ on my behalf.

Can you say that? Do you know what it is to look at God’s thundering, threatening law as a justified sinner and say, “All of the wrath deservingness has been exhausted in the death of Christ for me”?

If you are not able to do that, you are dishonoring God if you claim to be believing in Christ unto justification because that is the reality.

And then, secondly, the commending power of the kept law has been secured in the obedient life of Christ for me.

The Scripture says the law declares this do and thou shalt live. Had Adam continued in his obedience in the garden there would have been the reward of that righteousness of his obedience, access to the tree of life would have been given to him and he would have eaten of that tree of life and lived forever. By his disobedience, the first Adam forfeited that reward. But, bless God, the second Adam, the last man, Jesus, so fulfilled the law in his perfect life that the commending power of the kept law has been secured in the obedient life of Christ for me.

So Paul can write, “As through the one man’s disobedience, the many were constituted sinners,” Romans 5:19, “So through the obedience of the one, Jesus, the many are constituted righteous.”

And so when I am conscious I haven’t loved God with all my heart, when I am conscious I have not loved my neighbor as myself, I have broken the fourth, I have broken the seventh, I have broken the ninth commandment. I warrant to say: The reward for the righteousness of total, perfect, perpetual obedience to the law, that has been secured in the obedience of Jesus on my behalf.

So the condemning power of the broken law has been exhausted in the death of Christ for me. The commending power of the kept law has been secured in the obedient life of Christ for me. But then get hold of this third principle. The commanding power and governing rights of the law continue to abide for me. The cure, the commending Christ has taken care of that. But the commanding and governing rights of the law continue to abide for me as a justified sinner.

Justification resolves the controversy of God's law that would land me in his prison house called hell. But justification does not release me from being a creature obligated to render to God all that God righteously demands of me as a creature. God would have to cease to be God. You would have to cease to be a creature made accountable to God if the demands of the law were to be released because you are justified. God will not un God himself and he will not un man you.

John Owen wisely stated this truth. I came to that persuasion so clearly in my preparation several weeks ago. Then when I find the old masters in Israel stating it hundreds of years before I, quote, discover it, not discover it, no, no, no discovery, but stumbled over it. Listen to what Owen says on this point.

“Upon this complete justification believers are obliged unto universal obedience unto God. The law is not abolished, but established by faith, Romans 3:31. It is neither abrogated nor dispensed with by such an interpretation as should take off its obligation in anything it requires, nor as to the degree and manner wherein it requires it. Nor is it possible it should be so. For this obedience to the law is nothing but the rule of that obedience with the nature of God and man makes necessary from the one to the other.”

Owen says, “As long as God is God and man is man, the law is a necessary rule of his life.”

And then he goes on to say, “The commanding power of the law in positive precepts and prohibitions which justified persons are subject unto, does make and constitute all their inconformities unto it to be no less truly and properly sins in their own nature than they would be if their persons were still exposed to the curse of the law.”

You see his point? In justification God has removed the curse of the law. But he has not removed the commanding power of the law. And, therefore, failure to keep the law is as much sin as though we were not removed from the curse. Sin, in its ugly essence doesn't change because of the grace of justification.

Are you following me? Am I being clear enough? We have got to get hold of that, dear people. Clinging with all of the tenacity of the hand of faith to the marvelous truth, the condemning power of the broken law has been exhausted in the death of my Savior. Hallelujah. He condemns sin. God condemns sin in his flesh. And there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. The commending power of the kept law has been secured in the obedient life of my Savior and my representative so that all of that righteousness comprised of all of his obedience down to the minutia of every motive

and every thought and every word and every disposition and every action and every reaction from the womb till he breathed his last and then ascended back to heaven 40 days later, perfect, total, perpetual, unstained obedience to all of the demands of the law. And in him God sees me that way.

But if I go home this afternoon and my grandson does something that ticks me off and I have a sinfully angry disposition, that is as much sin as though I were still under the wrath of God outside of Christ and on my way to hell. It is sin that does not change its nature because of what we are as justified in Jesus Christ.

Now it is crucial. If you don't get hold of that, forget it. Forget it. You will never manage the matter and the problem of ongoing sin in a way that glorifies God and is healthy to your own soul.

Let me try to illustrate. I sit at my desk saying, "Lord, is there some way you can take these truths and bring them down to parallels." This is an effort to do so.

Imagine with me a king who rules by a legitimate heirship to the kingdom in which he rules. All of the laws that establishes are righteous and just and fair in the best interest of his subjects and secures his goals as a righteous, upright king. But there is another kingdom in which a nefarious, wicked, foul, immoral man reigns as king. And he does his best to conscript subjects from the kingdom of the righteous king, bring them under his sway and turn them into insurgents to send them back into that righteous kingdom. He turns their hearts against the king who is righteous, disaffects them and urges them to break his laws.

Well, here is a man who has come under the sway of that rival king and he has hard thoughts about the righteous, upright king whose rules are just and in the best interest of all of his subjects. And because of what he has become as a rebel, he is liable and exposed to punishment, to death itself for treason against the king.

And the king becomes aware of this scoundrel. And while he could send out his soldiers and his messengers to apprehend and execute him, he does a strange thing. He says, "Track him down. When you have tracked him down, try to persuade him to come before me and I stand in a posture of readiness, not to kill him, but to pardon him upon condition that he will become my loyal subject."

And so the messengers go out and they track down the scoundrel and he is overwhelmed as they persuade him of the true nature and character of the king that the king does not stand ready to execute him though he could and had every right to, but to take him back into his favor, so he does. This man embraces the mercy and the forgiveness and the pardon of the king.

But now let me ask you. Does that thereby exempt him from all the righteous, upright, fair laws that that king has established in his kingdom against which this man became a rebel and for which he became liable to punishment even unto death?

You say, “Of course not.”

If the laws of the king were righteous and fair and in the best interest of the subjects in securing the goals of the righteous king in the first place, the fact that the pardons the rebel and takes him back into his favor cannot change the standards of his kingdom.

And this ex rebel not only is obligated to embrace the laws of the king, he now has motives that he never had before. Before it was just the sheer authority of a righteous king. Now it is the authority of the righteous king buttressed by the received mercy and kindness and pardon of a loving king.

But the standards have not changed. The obligation of obedience is not changed. In fact, it has been heightened because of mercy shown and punishment averted.

In justification God pardons all of the sins, past, present and future as to their legal liability. They are all pardoned because their punishment was swallowed up in the death of Christ. And the righteous standard that would commend us to God and have us welcomed into his favor as totally obedient subjects, that commending power of the kept law has been secured in the obedient life of Christ for us. But the commanding and governing power of the law has not changed one whit. And, therefore, when we sin we violate God’s law and we provoke God’s displeasure and we commit affronts to the very being and person of God himself.

That is why it is vital to get hold of these distinctions. And though my sins that are violations of God’s law now as much as they were before I was justified by faith, those sins do not and cannot bring me back under the condemning power of the law of God. They do not and cannot dislodge me from the commending power of the law secured by my Savior. I am still under its commanding power and my sin is sin, transgression of the law.

Secondly, it is an affront to the being of God and provokes the displeasure of God.

Now I want you to turn with me to a case study where those three things are evident in God dealing with one of his justified sons. Turn with me, please, to 2 Samuel. You remember the context. David allows his eyes to roam where they never should have roamed, from a posture he never should have been in when kings go out to war. He should have been out to war. Instead he is lolly goggling around on his bed in the afternoon and he rises at evening and sees a woman bathing and he lusts after her and he brings her to him, commits adultery and then when he hears she is pregnant, he schemes in such a way to get her husband killed in the battle so he can take her as his wife, try to cover his sin.

In due course, because he is a truly justified man—if you doubt it, read Romans chapter four where Paul brings forward both David and Abraham as proof that Old Testament believers were justified by faith the same way we are, Abraham before the circumcision

and the giving of the law, David under the law. He brings forth proof from those two men, they were justified by faith just like we are. So this was a justified man.

And now God who is determined to bring him back into the way of the graces that accompany faith, ongoing repentance, ongoing life of holiness, ongoing commitment to the law of God. God sends a prophet to speak the word.

The prophet Nathan comes and now notice what he says, verse seven of 2 Samuel 12. "Nathan said to David, 'You are the man,'" after giving a parable that got to David's emotions. "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, delivered you out of the hand of Saul, gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your bosom, gave you the house of Israel and Judah. If that had been too little I would have added unto you such and such things.'"

Now notice. "Wherefore have you despised the Word of the Lord to do that which is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with a sword and taken his wife to be your wife and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."

What is the first part of the indictment? David, you have despised the Word of the Lord. The word "despised" here does not mean you have gritted your teeth and said, "I hate God's law." It means to regard lightly, as inconsequential.

And what word of the Lord did David despise in taking Bathsheba into an adulterous relationship and murdering Uriah? Six and Seventh Commandments. "Thou shalt do no murder."

David, you knew that word. You have declared how that word was your delight and you meditated upon it day and night. David, when your lust burned, you treated my word like junk. You despised the Word of the Lord which stood between you and the object of your burning lust. You could not lay your hands upon Bathsheba till you pushed with your hands my word from the regulating, governing influence upon your life. You despised that word which said you shall not commit adultery. And when you schemed away to have one of our captains, one of your generals have that noble soldier Uriah go up to the front lines in order to get him killed, you murdered him. My command, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, Sixth and Seventh Commands. David, you have despised them. Your sin was a violation of my holy law.

But, secondly, David, more than that, look at verse 10. "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house because," now notice the switch, "you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife."

You not only broke my law, treated it with scorn, but, David, your sin was an affront to me. My law is not some detached standard of conduct that exists out there in independence. It is a reflection of my righteous character as your covenant God. It is an expression of what I am and what I expect in my creature whom I made to reflect my image. And, David, when you took Bathsheba, when you killed Uriah, you not only

despised my law, your sin was a violation of my law. It was an affront to me. You despised me, David. If I were central in your thoughts you could not think of me without thinking of my gracious law word. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. But, David, you not only despised my Word, your sin was an affront to me. It was an affront to me. You treated me as though I were unworthy of being considered, that the only thing that mattered was your lust and then your pride in wanting to cover your sin.

David, you made out your bumper sticker. It is all about me. It is all about me. But, David, in other times you said, "Whom have I in heaven besides thee?" I

t is all about you, Lord. Life is all about pleasing you. Life is all about knowing you. Life is all about living in communion with you. But in that setting, it was all about me. My feelings, my passions, my desires, my lusts, my honor, my name, my reputation. God, you don't matter.

That is what we do when we sin.

You husbands get irritated with your wife, bring up her past sins. You are not only breaking the law of God, you are committing an affront to God himself because God in Jesus Christ says you are to be like him in his tender, patient, condescending, never ending love for his church.

When we sin what does Jesus do, throw us off like junk? Get a whole bunch of words and rip us open? One side that...?

No, no. We saw him this morning. He looks into the face of a man that took oaths and maledictions and denied that he knew him, he said, "Do you love me? Do you love me?"

He restored him tenderly, lovingly, wisely, patiently. Our sin is not only a transgression of the law of God. It is an affront to the very being of God. You have openly insulted me. You have lightly regarded me. That is why his chastisement as we will see in a moment was so great. He said, "Because of your sin, you have given the enemies of God occasion to what? Blaspheme."

What is blasphemy? Speaking ill of God. People would say, "Here is a guy who is supposed to be a lover of God. Look at how much he loves his God. He goes and takes another man's wife and then he kills the guy to cover up his sin because he gets her pregnant. What kind of God has David got?"

That was the big sin. He gave occasion for God to be blasphemed. People read the fact that his sin was an affront to God openly insulting and lightly regarding God. But then it was a provocation of the displeasure of God.

Look at the end of chapter 11. Chapter 11 contains the factual account of David's adultery and then his murder of Uriah.

Verse 27. “And when the morning was passed, David sent and took her home to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son, but... but the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. The thing he had done displeased the Lord.”

And it was that displeasure that brought upon David the chastisement that we have heard about in recent months in those latter chapters that pastor Carlson has expounded.

God says, “I will raise up evil against you out of your own house,” verse 11. “I’ll take your wives before your own eyes and give them to your neighbor and he will lie with your wives in the sight of the sun. You did it secretly. I will do it before all the sun.”

See, God doesn’t say, “You are now no longer my justified son. I am going to send you to hell. You have committed capital offenses, adultery and murder, punished by death in Israel.”

God says, “No. But you have provoked my displeasure. And given all your privileges and all your position and the fact that this is public knowledge, my displeasure will be manifested in severe, fatherly chastisement.”

Now, you say, “My sin is not murder. My sin is not adultery.”

Remember the word of James. “He who breaks one part of the law is guilty of all.”

Don’t be a de facto Roman Catholic listing your sins. Every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God.

The children’s catechism, remember it children? What doth every sin deserve? Every sin deserves the wrath and the curse of God.

How many sins caused our first parents to plunge themselves and our first father Adam and the whole human race? One. And as a child of God conscious of who and what I am as a justified sinner, I need to embrace the fact that when I sin as a justified sinner, my sin must be viewed and dealt with as sin.

Again, I turn to the old master John Owen who states this truth so beautifully and helpfully. He says that in the light of the blessing of the blood of Christ shed for sinners, quoting Hebrews 10:1-4, 10 and 14, this is what it does when I believe that the blood of Christ is the ground of my acceptance. “It takes away conscience condemning the sinner for sin with respect unto the curse of the law, trusting in the blood of Christ. What does that relationship in faith do when I am conscious of sin? It takes away conscience condemning me for that sin, but it does not take away conscience condemning sin in the sinner.”

See the difference? It takes away conscience condemning me for the sin, but it doesn’t take away conscience condemning that sin in me because the sin is still sin, a violation of

the law of God, an affront to the being of God and a provocation of the displeasure of God.

And, therefore, if I am to walk righteously and comfortably and honorably with God, principle number one, sin in the justified, pardoned sinner must be dealt with, must be acknowledged and dealt with as sin.

Now, if that is true, if my thesis is valid, then surely we shouldn't have to go far in our Bibles to find it cropping up here, there and everywhere. And in the time that remains I want to lay before you a few lines of evidence that that is exactly what we find.

First of all, we learn from the risen Christ in the midst of his churches with eyes as a flame of fire that his justified people are to take their sins seriously. We learn from the risen Christ in the midst of his justified people that his people are to take their sins seriously.

You know what I am referring to, Revelation chapters two and three.

John has this vision of the exalted, glorified, risen Christ walking amidst the candlesticks that are the churches. And that is not just my private interpretation. It is the interpretation given by the Lord himself. At the end of chapter one the seven candlesticks are the seven churches.

In five of the seven churches the Christ who begins every message with the words, "I know your works," because he moves among the churches it says, "with eyes as a flame of fire," the eyes of omniscience who says, "I know your works. I know you through and through."

There are two of the churches where he has nothing but commendation and encouragement, but in five of the seven churches he gives commendation in all but one of them. But he says, "I have this against you." And then he names their sins and then he calls them to own the sins and to repent of the sins and then he threatens of what he will do if they don't take their sin seriously.

Now in the world can people claiming to believe their Bibles say God sees no sin in his justified people? And yet I have seen that? He sees no sin in his justified people. All he sees is Christ.

Nonsense. Christ sees their sin. And what does he do? Let's look at just two examples, chapter two verse one.

"Unto the messenger or angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things that holds the seven stars in right hand, that walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, I know your work.'" And then he commends them in verses two and three. But verse four, "But I have this against you. I have got something against you."

There is an against between Christ and his justified people. Those that are in him, accepted in the beloved, but he has got a complaint against them. "I have this against you."

And what was it? They had all become adulterers, all become thieves and liars, perjurers? No. "You have left, you have abandoned your first love. Remember, therefore, whence you are fallen and repent and do the first works or else, or else..." Here is the threat. "I will come and I will remove your candlestick."

Does Jesus call his people to take their sin seriously as sin? Decidedly so. Chapter two verses 12 to 16.

"Unto the Church of Pergamum, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. You hold fast my name." He commends them. But verse 14, "I have a few things against you. You have some that hold the teaching of Balaam that taught Balak to cast a stumbling block," verse 15. "You have some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner repent or else I will come and make war against them with the sword of my mouth."

My friends, sin in the justified sinner is to be faced, acknowledged and dealt with as sin. We learn from the risen Christ in the midst of his churches with eyes as a flame of fire that his justified people are to take their sins seriously.

Secondly, we learn from the Lord's prayer that owning sin as sin and seeking forgiveness from God is to be a prominent part of our daily experience in prayer as the children of God. We learn from the Lord's prayer that owning sin as sin and seeking forgiveness is to be a prominent part of our daily experience in prayer as the children of God.

In Matthew chapter six our Lord tells his disciples how they are not to pray. They are not to pray like the hypocrites, but they are to pray with their prayers reflecting these perspectives.

Verse nine of Matthew six. "After this manner, therefore pray, 'Our Father...'"

He want us in our prayers to respect this marvelous privilege that, God willing, we will come to in a subsequent series of sermons on adoption, the great name revealed in Jesus Christ, the great name for God his Father. "Our Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done as in heaven so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Concern not only for forgiveness for sins committed, but for grace that we might not commit sin. Here our Lord teaches us that sin in his justified children is to be taken seriously. The word used here, "Forgive us our debts," is the word that speaks of an

unpaid obligation. And here the Lord says all of our unpaid obligations—by what standard—by the holy law of God.

Though I am justified my obligation to love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength every moment of every day in every situation without exception, that obligation has not been lessened. It has been heightened by the pressure of redemptive grace.

And knowing I fall short, I am to ask God, “Forgive that debt that I have not rendered to you.” And then I am still under obligation to love my neighbor as myself. Love works no ill to his neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Every situation where I have not thought of others first, but thought of myself first, every response to my wife and my children that has been insensitive and self centered, I have an unfilled debt to that second table of the law, to the second great commandment. And I am to be conscious that my sin is this unpaid debt as God has spoken in his law. And I am daily to take it seriously.

“Father, forgive my debts.”

And then, in the parallel passage in Luke 11 sin is not called debts, but the standard word *αμαρτιας* (ham-ar-tee'-ahs) in the plural for sins, the word that is the dominant word for sin in the New Testament, some 250 times.

Notice our Lord's directive when the disciples said, “Teach us to pray,” verse two of Luke 11. He said unto them, “When you pray, say, ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us day by day our daily bread and forgive us our *αμαρτιας* (ham-ar-tee'-ahs) our sins. They are my sins. I have committed them. I have stepped aside the mark. I have missed the mark of the standard you have set.”

Forgive us our sins.

God takes our sin seriously. He tells us as our children, we are to take them seriously.

Thirdly, we learn from Solomon that spiritual prosperity cannot be experienced in the path of covering sin. We learn from Solomon that spiritual prosperity cannot be experienced in the path of covering sin.

Proverbs 28:13. “He that covers his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy.”

Even a justified sinner who covers his transgressions will not prosper. He will not prosper. No, he will not come under judicial punishment for those sins. His standing accepted in the righteousness of Christ is not retracted. However, he will not prosper.

And he may meditate upon his justification till his mind breaks, but as long as there are sins we are covering, we are not willing to look at them for what they are, call them what they are, deal with them in the way that God says we must deal with them with God and often it is necessary with man, we will not prosper.

Whoever covers his sin shall not prosper, but blessed be God, whoso confesses, whoever says the same thing about them as God does and forsakes them has the renewed disposition of true repentance not to return to them. He shall obtain mercy.

Fourthly, we learn from David how a justified man after God's own heart deals with his sins. We learn from David how a justified man after God's own hearts deals with his sins.

Psalm 32. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence my bones wasted away through my groaning all the day long. Day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My moisture was changed as with the drought of summer."

In stubbornness David would not own his sin and deal with it. Months passed. He was miserable. He did not prosper though a justified man until, verse five, "I acknowledged my sin unto you and my iniquity did I not hide. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

See, we have to be careful with our terminology. Some write and say all of our sins, past, present and future are forgiven when we are justified. That is not quite accurate. Sin can't be forgiven until it is committed. To say all of the judicial punishment due to my sins is settled the moment I believe on the Lord Jesus, all my sins past, present and future as to having anything to do with them in the court of heaven in the way of judgment, that has been settled. But I must know what it is in the ongoing experience of the Christian life to acknowledge my sin, to call it what God calls it, to name it as God names it. He says, "I acknowledge my sin, my iniquity, my transgressions."

He uses the three standard Hebrew words to describe all that his sin was. It was missing the mark. It was crookedness. It was perverseness. It was stepping over the line.

"Lord, it was everything you say it was."

None of this nonsense, well, you know, my temperament or, you know, my upbringing...

That is not confessing sin. That is covering sin, blaming it on your genes, blaming it on your background, blaming it on your domestic example. Nonsense. When God calls it sin, you call it sin with no buts.

Dear I blew my cork, but...

No, no, no, no, no, no, no. You blew your cork. You sinned. You lost your temper. You didn't have self control. That is your sin.

Ah, yes, but didn't...

That's... no, no. If she provoked you, that is her sin. You let God deal with her and in due course after you have thoroughly dealt with yours you may want to come and say, "Now, dear here..."

But no buts. David has got no buts here.

I acknowledge my sin, but Lord... What in the world was Bathsheba doing out there naked so I could see her?

No. No.

I am amazed how people without shame can transfer the responsibility of a sin here, there and somewhere else. David shows us a justified man dealing with his sin in a way that a man after God's own heart deals with it. And you find the same thing in Psalm 51.

Notice verse three, after pleading for mercy and for washing.

"I know my transgressions, my sin is ever before me. Against you and you only have I sinned and done that which is evil in your sight that you may be justified when you speak and be clear when you judge."

What is he saying? He says, "God, when you make a judgment about my sin, you say it is my baby, nobody else's. And now, Lord, I agree with you. I own the sin. It is my transgression. I have sinned. I have done the evil that you maybe justified when you speak, that is, that you may be declared right and righteous when you call it my sin and nobody else's. It is mine, all mine. And I am ready to own it as such."

And then, finally, we learn from the apostle Paul the kind of dealing with sin and the justified community that warrant apostolic commendation and pastoral joy. What kind of dealing with sin with bring apostolic commendation and pastoral joy? You read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. Our time is gone. I don't have time to read the passage. But you read these words. What clearly of yourselves, what vehemence, what zeal, all of which was focused on dealing with sin as sin.

Dear people, we are not going to get anywhere allowing our dealing with sin to be conditioned by modern psychological theories, by the blunted conscience of society. We must come to the place as justified men and women determined to deal with this problem. How do I live with the realities of my justified standing and the reality of my remaining sin?

Principle number one is we must deal with our sin as sin, transgression of the law of God, an affront to the being of God and a provocation of the displeasure of God. And thank God in one of the passages we will come to in a subsequent message we have the promise if we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Yes, I know, you will empty a lot of churches in our day preaching on sin, period, and dare to preach several dozen messages on how sin is to be dealt with in the courtroom and in the theater of our own lives, who wants to hear about sin?

I'll tell you who does, people that are serious about getting to heaven. Because nothing unclean is going to enter there. And in this place as long as people are serious about getting to heaven, being user friendly won't amount to diddly.

And then it is some other concern enters and becomes the focus. Then there is irritation about the great question: How can sinful man be right with God? And how can those who are right with God continue to deal righteously with the sin that yet remains? May God help us. We will be a people determined to walk in the light as he is in the light knowing that as we do we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus, God's Son, goes on cleansing us from all sin.

Let's pray.

Father, we are so thankful that your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our pathway. And we earnestly pray that you will help us as your people, that in this matter that we have been wrestling with, our thinking may be hammered out on the anvil of Scripture and that you will write upon the tablets of our hearts your precepts, that we may be a people who deal with our sin in a way that magnifies your grace and in a way that keeps our souls healthy.

We pray for those who have never run to Christ for whom the court of heaven has even now an unresolved controversy. We ask, Lord, give them no rest until they run to Christ and hide in him and find in him the full pardon of all of their sins and the acceptance and reception of their persons as righteous in Jesus Christ.

Hear our prayer and answer us, we plead, in his name. Amen.