

## Confession – the self antidote to sin

I John 1 – 2:2; Ps 32 (Sermon three)

It was said that a man who claimed to be ‘without sin’ once confronted Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher. Intrigued, the preacher invited this man home for dinner. After hearing the claims through, Spurgeon arose from his chair, simply picked up his glass of water and threw it straight into the man’s face.

Well, immediately and understandably this ‘perfect’ man showed his imperfections, causing quite a scene, allowing his anger and language to cross the line of courtesy. To which Spurgeon (with a twinkle in his eye, I would imagine) replied, “Ah, you see, the old man within is not as dead as you claim. He had simply fainted. I have revived him with but a glass of water!”

John is dealing here with **3 errors, 3 false claims about sin** in the Christian life that the false teachers were preaching. The first error says sin doesn't matter. The logic goes like this: “Well, yes, we still go on sinning in our flesh, but it doesn't matter because we are spiritual beings now. Christianity has to do with our spirit and not with the flesh, and so what we do in the flesh doesn't matter.” So we can sin, we can—to use the language of verse 6—we can “walk in darkness and still have fellowship with the God of light” because it's the flesh that's walking in darkness, not the spirit.

The second error, is that we are freed entirely from sin in the Christian life. This logic suggests sin doesn't exist at all. We see this logic from John's responses in verses 8 & 10.

Also in verse 10, we find the third error of these false teachers, which is – we can be perfect, since once we proclaim Jesus, we don't sin at all.

But our scripture and the whole Bible, teaches us the opposite. It assumes that sin is a given in our lives. Here John offers us **three specific ways, three assurances** on how to deal with sin – beyond the positive and negative contrasts we find in this text. First we are told, “If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son, cleanses us from all sin.”

Second, we are promised, and we will focus on this today, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” It's a wonderful verse to memorize. Post it in your brain. Pin it to your heart. This is where our focus will be this morning.

Third, we are assured “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world.”

Abraham Lincoln once said, “It is the duty of nations as well as men, (and women) to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon.” And indeed genuine repentance or confession does lead to mercy & pardon, or to forgiveness and cleansing, as John words it, because God is truly “faithful and just.”

Confession is important because it is the expression of our ongoing repentance. It's how we deal with sin & the sin nature. John makes it clear that regular repentance and confession are part of a normal, ongoing Christian life. So the proper attitude of the Christian toward sin is not to deny that we have a sin problem, but instead to realize the ongoing reality of sin and then to be ready to confess it to God and to others. We need to recognize that we always struggle with sin.

Repentance and confession is not some thing that we do once at the beginning of the Christian life, and we're done with it. Instead faith, repentance and confession characterize the Christian life as we recognize the seriousness of sin. So why is regular confession necessary? How is confession beneficial?

**When we confess our sins, we receive a divine sense of God's forgiveness.** David talks about that in Psalm 32. He proclaims, "When I was silent about my sins my bones waxed old." He felt the displeasure of God upon him because he was walking not in the way of truth, nor was he confessing his sins.

Then he tells us, "But when I confessed my sins, the Lord restored me." We know this from our own experiences. When we try to cover our sins in relationships with one another, we know what a wedge that drives in between us and our friends. But when we confess them and we repent of them, the relationship is restored. And so also in the Christian life when we refuse to deal with our sins through repentance and confession, we are burdened and dogged by unresolved guilt. But when we confess ourselves to God, and to each other, it is as healing to the bones. It's like a fracture being set and healed.

**A second reason for regular confession is, it keeps sin from controlling us.** Even though we are united with Christ, and follow Jesus, we are warned in Romans, (6:12-13) "Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness." So confession keeps us aimed in the right direction.

The Bible describes sin as a roaring lion, prowling around, always ready to devour us.

Even mature believers who have been forgiven by God's mercy, still struggle with sin. Look at Abraham, David & Peter. We don't doubt that Peter believed it when he said to the Lord Jesus "I'll die for you," and we should never forget that one day he did. Peter laid his life down for the honor & the name & the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, but, you know what? He did deny Jesus. Why would we be any different when it comes to giving in to temptations, destructive emotions and fears?

Regular confession is necessary to receive a divine sense of God's forgiveness. And frequent confession is beneficial because it keeps sin from controlling us. It's simply a good habit to develop.

**A third benefit of regular confession is it's not a one time, past action in the Christian life; it's an ongoing project.** It keeps our spiritual accounts current. It keeps us from back sliding too much. One of the problems with sin is that it tends to snowball. Confession is a spiritual act of self protection.

Edwin Cooper was famous across America, for being Bozo the Clown on TV in the 1950's, after a time with the Barnum and Bailey Circus. He constantly reminded people to get checked for cancer. But he was so busy that he neglected to follow his own advice. By the time his cancer was discovered, it was too late for it to be treated. Edwin Cooper died at just forty-one years of age from a disease he had warned many others to watch out for.

Sin is far more deadly than the most aggressive and fast growing cancer. Sin kills and destroys everything it touches. Sin takes no prisoners. This is the purpose behind everything Satan does. Jesus said, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (*John 10:10*). Because of his evil nature and his hatred of everything good, the

devil brings destruction to everything within his reach.

When we regard sin as God does, we find nothing amusing or humorous about it. We will not make it the subject of the jokes we tell or those we hear. We will not allow ourselves to be tempted to get a little closer to the line to see if we are still safe. God hates sin with a holy and righteous fury, and so should we. When we find ourselves amused by sin, it is time for us to focus on the cross. Seeing the price paid for our sin reminds us that it is no laughing matter.

**Another reason confession is necessary is because sin is displeasing to God.** This is why the various concepts of Gnosticism that deny or down play sin are so distasteful to God. Proverbs tells us, (15:9) “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord but he loves him who pursues righteous-righteousness.” Hebrews 10:26 warns us, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” And you know this familiar verse, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (R 6:23)

When we trust in Jesus for salvation, the penalty for sin is spared to us. What we deserve is Hell, but God spares us of that penalty. And furthermore, as God deals with us, He never pours His wrath out on us as the punishment for sin. Now, He offers mercy and discipline. But the sin that we commit is still displeasing to Him, and that displeasure will exist as long as sin exists. So the Bible tells us that there will be a day when God not only has removed the penalty of sin from us, as He already has as we trust in Jesus Christ, but in glory He will remove the sin from us so that we will be like His Son. And until the day that He does that, He will continue to be displeased when there is sin in us because it is

not what He made us to be. So we keep confessing our sins.

Lastly, **the fifth reason we confess our sin is that the end, the goal, of our salvation is not “rescue from Hell”; the goal of our salvation is holiness in the glory of God.**

I Peter 1 (13-16) tells us, “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

God intends to make us morally like his Son. John calls Jesus “the Righteous.” God intends for us to have a clean conscience because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and because He has transformed us from the inside out so that we are morally like His Son. We are perfected. That's what the Bible calls holiness. God wants to sanctify us – clean us up. And one day by His grace we will all stand glorified without sin before Jesus, and we'll never ever sin again. But until that day, we confess our sins. That's why we confess our sins even though we are already forgiven.

Fredrick Nietzsche said, “If God is dead, everything is permitted.” And he was right. But, if God is alive and if He is light, then sin is not permitted. That's why John tells us the key response and answer to the denial of sin is confession of sins. Instead of condemning us, God chose to: “If we confess our sins, Jesus, who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteous-ness.” This is a promise that brings light, life and joy!