



“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” I John 1:9.

Victory Through Fellowship

Lesson Aim: To show that believers can live victoriously by confessing sins as they are committed

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Topic: Fellowship: With God; Sin: Confession of.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” I John 1:9. How wonderful is God's promise of full release and removal of all sin to the person who will “confess” his sins.

The promise involves two persons: the sinner and the Savior. Each has a part. The sinner's part is to “confess” his sins. The Savior's part is to forgive and cleanse the repentant sinner. A miracle of grace transpires when the sinner and the Savior meet.

What does it mean to “confess” one's sins? (1) It does not mean to enumerate specific acts of wrongdoing. No one can remember each deed. (2) It does not mean to declare one's sins in the hearing of another human being, be he priest, preacher, parent, or any other. **“... Who can forgive sins but God only?”** Mark 2:7. (3) It does not mean to berate one's self because of sins or to grieve long over them.

To “confess” means “to agree with.” The ministry of the Holy Spirit is, in part, to convict men of their sin. When He convicts a person of wrongdoing, and that person admits to God that the conviction of the Holy Spirit is true (he has sinned in the areas of conviction), he thereby confesses his sins. Confession is agreeing with the verdict of the Holy Spirit and admitting to God that what God calls sin in one's life is sin, indeed.

I. REVELATION (1:1-3)

The whole fabric of the Christian faith is dependent upon the truth of the self-disclosure of God. (1) God is available that man may meet Him. (2) God can be met because He has made Himself known, not because man has sought Him and found Him. That act of God's self-revelation is the very heart of the Christian faith.

A. A Person — One should not misunderstand the impersonal terms, "that which," in verse 1. "That which was from the beginning" is none other than "He who was from the beginning." God's revelation is not concerning a thing, but rather a Person.

"That which was from the beginning" is none other than "the Word of Life." **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,"** John 1:1. When the Word was made manifest, He was called Jesus of Nazareth.

The essence of the Christian gospel is relationship with a Person. There are doctrines involved, but one can believe the doctrines and not be truly Christian. On the other hand, one can know God personally in Jesus Christ and be a Christian even if He is not a specialist in doctrinal truth. Jesus said, **"... This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent,"** John 17:3. Christians preach a Person.

B. A pre-existent person — He whom God announced through I John 1:1 is He who was "from the beginning." From the beginning of what? Is reference to the beginning of creation, or the beginning of human history, or the beginning of the incarnation? "From the beginning" is much more inclusive than any or all of those suggestions; it means "from eternity." God declares the eternal existence of Christ. He affirms the "pre-existence" of the Savior — that He existed in full personality and power before He was born of Mary. Jesus of Nazareth is the eternally-existent Son of God.

Old Testament prophets wrote of the pre-existent Christ. Micah wrote of Him, **"... whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,"** 5:2. Isaiah announced, **"... his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace,"** 9:6. He is eternally God.

In saying He "was" from the beginning, John used a grammatical form which suggests what always has been. Christ the Word did not come to be at some point in time. When the beginning began, He already was. He "was" before He "was manifested," John 1:1, 14.

C. An incarnate person — John reported that He who eternally was

became what He was not: “. . . **The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,** (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) **full of grace and truth,**” John 1:14. Jesus was a real person of flesh and bone. In Him, God dwelt in a human body. His voice could be heard; His form could be seen; His body could be touched. Jesus was God manifest as a Man.

D. A manifested person — John repeatedly referred to Christ's being “manifested,” The term means to bring to light and make known what already exists. In the historic event of the birth and life of Jesus, God unfolded (revealed) Himself before the eyes of men. Believers should worship before the feet of Jesus: He is God in human flesh! One who beholds the person called Jesus has seen God!

II. FELLOWSHIP (1:3-7)

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us . . . with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,” verse 3. A little lad, asked what was the meaning of “fellowship,” replied with wisdom beyond his years: “I guess it means two fellows in the same ship.” Indeed, it does mean “mutual sharing.” The incarnate Christ is the basis of all true Christian fellowship.

A. Fellowship is possible only through the declared gospel (verse 3). John made it quite clear that it is the preaching of truth about the incarnate Christ which makes Christian fellowship possible. There are many different kinds of fellowship. Fraternal orders, political parties, business relationships, and sports involvement afford a basis for fellowship. Christian fellowship is fully and totally dependent upon mutual relationship in Jesus; that relationship is established through the gospel.

B. Fellowship is expressed toward man and toward God (verse 3). John wanted his readers to have “fellowship with us.” That was not enough, however. He clarified the kind of fellowship of which he wrote by adding, **“. . . truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”** Christian fellowship between brethren is a reflection of the fellowship between each Christian and his God. So intimately are human fellowship and divine fellowship bound together that John wrote, **“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”** I John 4:20.

C. Fellowship produces joy (verse 4). God is concerned with more than the fact of fellowship; He wants the believer to experience the enjoyment of

fellowship in Christ. God never intended for the Christian life to be lived in isolation. Just as He bears an unbroken communion with believers by His indwelling Spirit, He wants believers to abide in fellowship with one another. He inspired John to write, “We are making our announcement to you so that the fellowship may be kept unbroken and you may go on enjoying fellowship day by day.” Here is how to be a happy Christian: keep your fellowship with God the Father and your fellow believers in Christ. That way, your joy will keep on being full.

D. Fellowship is hindered by sin (verses 5-7). Christian fellowship is a mutual sharing with both man and God. The character of God will determine the character of fellowship with Him. God has told believers about Himself, therefore, that they might have continual fellowship with Him.

How may the character of God be described? John replies, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” Light speaks of moral perfection. Darkness speaks of moral evil. John's statement means, “God is holy, and in Him is no sin at all.”

Any Bible believer knows that. What difference does that make in man's fellowship with Him? John continued, **“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth,”** verse 6. The believer should watch out! He who testifies of fellowship with God, but makes the ways of sin his manner of living, is living a lie. His words and his life are both a lie. “A life in moral darkness can no more have communion with God, than a life in a coal-pit can have communion with the sun” — Plummer. Knowing that fact, believers should live by it.

E. Fellowship may be constantly renewed (verse 7). Since sin hinders fellowship with God, what can the Christian do when he has erred from the way of righteousness? There is cleansing and renewal available through the blood of Jesus Christ. Sin hinders fellowship; forgiveness renews it.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, with His attendant victory in the resurrection, has an efficacy that includes the whole Christian life. By Him the soul is saved once-for-all upon repentance and faith. By Him the life is cleansed continuously and progressively by repentance and confession of sin.

That does not mean sin is totally removed from Christian experience. It rather means that when the believer errs, God forgives and renews Him through Jesus' blood.

One should not languish in broken fellowship. He should confess his sins to God, ask for His forgiveness, and be restored to the joys of his salvation.

III. CONFESSION (1:8-10)

A. There are three great errors concerning sin which confuse the minds of many. God shows the truth concerning all three.

(1) Some deny that sin makes any difference in one's fellowship with God (verse 6). John denied the doctrine, saying, **“If we SAY that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we LIE and do not the truth,”** verse 6. Sin estranges the sinner from God. No one can live in sin and enjoy the fellowship of God at the same time.

(2) Some deny that the sin-principle is in them (verse 8). They claim to be sinless because there is no tendency in them to cause them to sin. That teaching denies the dear Bible doctrine of the depravity of all men. It indicates a lack of awareness of the nature of sin or of the law of God. Every person has the sin-principle at work in him.

Two grave errors follow that one: (a) “We deceive ourselves.” By their fault, not their misfortune, believers are personally responsible for departure from truth by such teaching. (b) “The truth (of God as revealed in the gospel) is not in us.”

(3) Some deny that they have acts of sin for which they need to receive forgiveness (verse 10). “This is really the climax of the three false assertions found in verses 5-10. One could theoretically agree that sin affects fellowship with God (verse 6), could agree that sin exists as a principle within our nature (verse 8), and then deny that he actually had committed sins (verse 10)” — Curtis Vaughn.

A denial of sinful acts makes God a liar! God declared, **“... All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,”** Romans 3:23. God's way of salvation is based upon the doctrine that men have sins which need to be forgiven. A denial of personal sin makes God a liar.

It is the nature of sin to grow more rash as it is practiced. That is shown in the expressions used of the three errors regarding sin: “we lie” (verse 6), “we deceive ourselves” (verse 8), “we make God a liar” (verse 10). Sin is terrible. One should flee from it lest it enslave him.

B. There is one great truth concerning sin which liberates the spirits of believers in Jesus Christ. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,”** verse 9.

Sin is real. Sin is personal. Sin is destructive. To those facts, one more should be added: sin can be forgiven in Jesus Christ.

Bring your sin before God. Agree with the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Tell God the truth about your sin. Ask His forgiveness. When you do, God will forgive (lift up and bear away) your sins and will cleanse away all

stain which remains. Praise God for forgiveness of sin. It is like being born again into a new life. It is like being created all over. It is like being raised out of death into life. It is available to you, right now.

Does your heart cry out for victory over sin? Would you know the joy of personal and unbroken fellowship with God? Do you want daily victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil? You can have victory over all in Jesus Christ.

Keep yourself from sin, so far as possible. By an act of the will, refrain from sinful associates or sinful deeds. If you do stumble, seek immediate forgiveness and renewal. (Unconfessed and unforgiven sin will, like disease germs, destroy your vitality.) The only remedy for sin is the blood of Jesus Christ. Read I John 2:1, 2 and rejoice!

You will never know sinless perfection in the present life. You can know increasing sanctification and victory over sin as you grow in grace. Growth, not perfection, is the essence of the Christian life.

Questions

1. What is sin?
2. What does it mean to confess one's sins?
3. What does forgive mean?
4. What is the pre-existence of Christ?
5. What is fellowship?
6. How is fellowship with God related to fellowship with man?
7. How does fellowship produce joy?
8. How does the believer deal with sin in daily life?
9. What three errors do men make concerning their sin?
10. How may forgiveness of sin be received?