

Confession comes before forgiveness

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. - 1 John 1:9

God tells us to confess our sins and He will forgive them. This is perhaps one of the most amazing promises of the Bible, and also, unfortunately, a stumbling block for many people. The verse is clear but the implications can be immense. Let's take a look at the idea of confession throughout the Bible.



Admitting our sins is a constant theme in the Bible. Adam and Eve had to admit their sin to God when they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil (see Gen 3:10-13). God appeared to Adam and asked him where he was and what he was doing. Was God unsure? Isn't God omnipotent (all knowing)? Why did God want Adam to tell Him where he was and what he was doing? God wanted Adam to admit his sin.

The children of Israel had to offer sacrifices for their sins and publically admit their sins to ask for forgiveness. The Levites served at the temple to offer the sacrifices, but each family had to bring the sacrifices to offer at the temple. If a family did not bring sacrifices to the temple, they were not part of the sacrificial ritual and not following God's plan for the children of Israel; they were still in their sin. The sacrifice forced the Israelites to see the effects of their sin as the animal that they traveled with to the temple was killed in front of them and its blood drained out as an offering for their sin. There was no lack of understanding in Israel of the effects of sin.

Jesus preached on repentance (Matthew 4:7) and told us that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Every place Jesus went he preached that men should repent of their sin and seek God's grace. Often Jesus forgave sins himself, but he always required a broken heart before he offered forgiveness. Many people were healed physically, but the Bible only records a fraction that were healed spiritually. Jesus required a repentant heart for forgiveness of sin.

The Apostle John, now in this inspired letter tells us that if we confess our sin, God will forgive us. This leads us to an important truth about scripture: God wants us to admit and confess our sin before He is willing to forgive it. This is often the hardest part of the gospel. We live in a day where moral relativism has swept our country and we are all influenced by its ideals. The "I'm a good person, God won't judge me" excuse that many hide behind is rooted in this argument. We look around and see others worse than ourselves and think that God isn't going to be unhappy with me because I'm so much better than that guy. The simple fact is that this is an excuse to avoid acknowledging our sin. Sin is the basis for the gospel message, and unless we acknowledge our sin and ask God to forgive us, we cannot see the kingdom of heaven.



Acknowledging our sin is uncomfortable, and scary for all of us. If there is a right and a wrong, and if I am wrong in God's eyes, then the only thing I can do is to fall before God and ask for forgiveness. The Bible makes it clear that I cannot earn my forgiveness. So in order to see the need for a gospel I need to first see my sin as sin. This is what John is saying in this verse.

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God is not in the business of forgiving un-repentant sin. Does this mean that I need to confess each and every sin in some kind of over-obsessed repentance or if I miss one God will not forgive it? No. This verse is explaining our view of sin, not each and every sin we commit. God knows about more sin in my life than I even recognize. Those attitudes of pride and selfishness that I haven't realized are on God's mind. How could I ever express confession or repent of those sins in my life that I haven't even fully understood yet? Reading this verse in context helps us to better understand what John is trying to express here. Let's begin at verse 5 and read through verse 10

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John is comparing those that recognize their sin with those that do not. He is explaining that if we say we are good enough (have no sin) we are making God a liar, but if we acknowledge our sin, and seek God's forgiveness, then God will forgive us through the sacrifice that Jesus offered on the cross. This is the entire basis for the Gospel. Without sin there is no need for a Savior!

If it is true that the entire basis of the gospel is the recognition of sin, then why is it that many of our churches today do not preach on sin? The Bible talks about sin and judgment more than any other topic, but sadly, many sermons only allude to this concept today. Many preachers would rather "tickle the ears" of the people with good sounding and comfortable sermons than risk upsetting people by preaching about sin. 2 Timothy 4:3-5 instructs us.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off

into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.



In this letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul is reminding Timothy to preach the gospel of Christ, and not to swerve off into easy teachings that are designed to bring in a crowd and sound good to the listeners. The gospel of Christ is that we are sinners, and we must acknowledge that sin to fully understand the separation that this sin has caused between us and God. Jesus paid the price for our sin and offered His salvation for us as a free gift (Rom 6:23). This gift is ours for the receiving if we confess our sin and accept Jesus as our savior. We do not need to live in a constant state of confession because Jesus paid the price for our sin on Calvary – rather we need to recognize our sins and accept Jesus’s gift of forgiveness.

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