

Discipleship on Confession of Sin

Someone has said the most important word for the unsaved person to understand is *believe*, while the most important word for the saved person to understand is *confess*. These statements are true because these are the concepts that affect one's relationship with the true and living God. One who never comes to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation remains under condemnation for his sin (John 3:18). One who has believed, but never understands or appropriates confession of sins committed after believing, will never enjoy the fullness of the new life God has given him, nor will he ever develop spiritual maturity.

Because confession of sins is essential for spirituality in any Believer, we should always seek to teach it to those we counsel for salvation and assurance. However, because believing children and young people will struggle with this sin nature all their lives, it is also important to teach them about their need to confess sin regularly. The following are some of the foundational truths about confession that all Believers need to be firmly established in.



I. Definition of Confession (for Believers)

To confess your sins as a Believer is to:

- 1) Agree with God that what you have thought, said, or done is sinful in His sight (something He does not like; something against His Word and His will).
- 2) Be genuinely sorry for that sin and willing to repent and turn from it (realizing how God feels about it).
- 3) Choose to ask God to forgive you and help you never to do it again.

This definition comes from an understanding of the original Greek words that the Holy Spirit led the Apostle John to use in the key New Testament verse on confession, 1 John 1:9. The original word for *confess* is "homolegeo". *Homo* means *the same*; and *legeo* means *to speak or say*. Thus, the literal meaning is *to say the same thing, or to agree*. Genuine confession is agreeing with God that what you have done is indeed sin. If you are in full agreement with God about what you have done, it also means that you will want to turn from that sin (repent). You will be sorry you have done it. If there is no sorrow or expectancy to turn from sin, then genuine confession has **not** taken place. Remember that sin caused the suffering and death of God's Son. He hates sin and He wants you to hate it too . . . enough to turn from it. This does **not** mean that you will never commit that particular sin again. It does mean that you are genuinely grieved over committing that sin and you are willing to ask God to help you never to do it again.

II. Key Verses on Confession of Sin

A. 1 John 1:9



"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

- ◆ What does it mean to confess your sins? →
- ◆ What does “forgiveness” mean? →
- ◆ Who do we confess our sins to? →

B. Psalm 19:12 (a Psalm of David)



"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults."

- ◆ Why might a person not understand all his errors? →
- ◆ Why should we ask forgiveness for “secret faults”? →

C. Psalm 32:5 (a Psalm of David)



"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

- ◆ Why should you acknowledge your sins to a God who knows everything? →
- ◆ When are you forgiven of your sins? →

D. Proverbs 28:13



"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

- ◆ How do people try to “cover” their sins? →

◆What does “they will not prosper” mean? →

◆Why must we “forsake” our sin, as well as “confess” it? →

E. Psalm 51:2



"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

◆How are we “washed thoroughly” from our iniquity? →

◆How are we cleansed from our sin? →

F. James 4:8



*"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and
purify your hearts, you double-minded."*

◆How do we draw near to God? →

◆How can we “cleanse our hands” and “purify our hearts”? →

◆What does it mean to be “double-minded”? →

G. James 5:16a



*"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that
you may be healed."*

◆What does it mean to “confess your sins to one another”? →

◆How/when are we to do this? →

◆What are we to pray for each other about? →

III. Important Teaching on Confession

A. *What* is Confession of Sin?

Confession of sin is agreeing with God that what you thought, said, or did was sin, being sorry for it, and asking God to forgive you and to help you never to do it again.

B. *Who* Needs to Confess Their Sins?

There is a confession of sin that unbelievers are urged to make, but this confessing also includes the idea of confessing or agreeing with what God has said about the person and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9).

"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved."



This confession is based on a heart of belief that Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, died in your place and was raised from the dead. This confession (agreement) brings forgiveness and everlasting life to you. You no longer stand condemned before God because of your sin. You have been forever pardoned (Rom. 8:1)

However, the confession being spoken of here is for those who have already accepted this salvation, but who have committed sin after receiving eternal life. The believing person does **not** stand condemned for this sin because that was settled when he placed his faith in Christ. What is affected now is the degree of fellowship he can have with the Lord who has saved him.

That **Believers** are exhorted to confess their sins after salvation is revealed in the key New Testament verse on confession, 1 John 1:9. John is writing this to Believers, as is seen by the fact that:

- 1) John uses special terms that indicate those he is sending this letter to already have a spiritual family relationship; *my little children, brethren, sons of God* (1 John 2:1,12,28; 3:1,13).
- 2) The writer, John, who we know was a believer, includes himself in 1 John 1:9 with the plural pronoun "we."
- 3) He makes specific statements elsewhere stating that those he is writing to are saved (1 John 2:12-14,21; 3:2; etc.).

C. When Should the Believer Confess His Sin?

If a Believer of any age truly desires to fully agree with God about a sin he committed, then he will want to confess it **immediately**--as soon as he recognizes what he has done is, in fact, sin. God is holy and cannot tolerate the presence of sin for a single moment. A true Believer should feel the same way and be alert to the presence of sin in his life, whether in thought, word, or action--and immediately want to confess it to God. It is so sad that so many Christians seem content to tolerate sin in their daily lives. There are too few who are really searching their hearts to see if there is any sin present to confess. Every Believer needs to become like the psalmist who cried . . .



"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me . . ."
--Psalm 139:23,24

Rather than having such a heart that seeks to search out sin and confess it, most seem satisfied to speak a general prayer of confession only occasionally, perhaps only a few times a year. However, the Bible informs us that the old sinful nature we were born with is not removed until we are in heaven. Until then, we will experience the struggle between this sinful nature and the new nature we received at the moment of salvation (Galatians 5:17). Although God has provided us the power to have victory over this old nature, too often Believers fail to appropriate it and they fall into sin. When this happens, the first thing to do is confess the sin.



Thus, all Believers need to:

- 1) Recognize they do sin even after salvation (1 John 1:8)
- 2) Recognize the need to keep short accounts with God concerning that sin (confess it **immediately**)
- 3) Recognize that because one often yields to the power of his old sinful nature (and the temptations of the world and Satan), confession should be done **frequently**, probably several times a day.

D. To Whom is Sin Confessed?

The answer found in 1 John 1:9 is God Himself. Why? Because all sin is, first of all, against Him and His standards (Psalm 51:4). He is the only One who can grant true forgiveness (Mark 2:7). The pronoun "he" used in 1 John 1:9 is clearly referring to God (mentioned in 1 John 1:5). Today there are no mediators between God and man except the Lord Jesus Himself (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Lord Jesus Christ has opened the way for all Believers to have direct access to God's presence. No earthly priest can truly grant forgiveness. Only God can.

So, we need to teach believing children and youth to go directly to God in prayer whenever they need to confess their sin.



Elsewhere in Scripture the principle is taught that one should also confess his faults to the ones he has openly offended (James 5:16a; Matthew 5:23,24). This means that if the Believer has said or done something against another person, after he confesses it to God, he should go to that person and ask for forgiveness.

E. How Should the Believer Confess His Sin?

The basic pattern to follow when confessing sin is:

1. Name your sin specifically

*"I realize that I sinned against you when I _____
(name the specific sin)."*

2. Express your sorrow for sinning and desire for forgiveness

"I am sorry for displeasing You. Please forgive me."

3. Express your desire to turn from that sin (true repentance)

"Please help me to never do this again."

F. What are the Results of Confession?

The promise from God in this verse is precious. When you truly confess your sins, then God promises to *forgive* and *cleanse* from all unrighteousness.

Forgiveness:

The word *forgive* means *to send, to cancel, or to remove*. When God promises to forgive our sins, He is promising to remove them and no longer hold us accountable for them.

- ◆Psalm 103:12 →
- ◆Isaiah 38:17 →
- ◆Micah 7:19 →
- ◆Hebrews 10:17 →



They have all already been paid for by the Lord Jesus. When one believes on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, the eternal punishment all sins deserve is forever canceled and forgiven (past, present, and any future sins; Acts 10:43). However, fellowship with our heavenly Father is only restored when a person confesses his sin.

It is important to teach that although God promises to forgive the sin, He does not always send away all the consequences that may come to you because of your sin (see 2 Samuel 12:7-14; Numbers 20:12).

Cleansing:

Confession also brings a **cleansing** from spiritual impurities that sin brings. This brings about the restoration to purity in one's life that is needed in order to have close intimate fellowship with a holy God (1 John 1:6). Notice 1 John says that a person will be cleansed from **all** unrighteousness, or anything that is hindering fellowship with God. The only condition is confession (total agreement with God about that sin).

G. Consequences of Unconfessed Sin in the Believer's Life

The effects of unconfessed sin in a Believer's life are quite serious. A careful study of the following scriptures should motivate one to take the matter of teaching believing children and young people about confession very seriously. Without confession, Believers will experience:

1. Loss of joy in the Christian life

Jesus and the New Testament writers have a lot to say about the genuine “joy” that is to be part of the Christian life. Unconfessed sin robs you of that joy.

1 John 1:9 was part of what was written so you would experience full joy as a Believer.

1 John 1:4 →

1 John 1:9 →

Psalm 51:12 →



2. Loss of fellowship

This fellowship with God allows intimate sharing together and closeness. Sin limits, hinders, and can break this fellowship.

1 John 1:6 →

3. Loss of fellowship with fellow Christians

Only as you are walking in purity will you truly have fellowship with fellow Believers. We are also told to separate from Believers who continue to live in sin.

1 John 1:7 →

2 Thessalonians 3:6 →

4. Loss of assurance of salvation

One can only experience assurance of his salvation as he is obeying God's commands--one of which is confession of sin.

1 John 2:3-5 →

5. Loss of ability to understand spiritual truth

In 1 Cor. 3:1-4, their continuing in sin kept them from being able to understand deeper spiritual truths.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 →

6. Loss of answered prayer

The Bible is clear in revealing that personal sin hinders our prayers. God will not fully respond to our pleas as long as we are holding on to our sin or wrong motives for our prayers.

Psalms 66:18 →

James 4:3 →

7. Loss of special opportunities to serve God on earth

The Apostle Paul shared his fear that having overlooked sin in his life would lead him to be a "castaway," one who would be disqualified from further ministry for God.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 →

8. Loss of blessing and prosperity in life and ministry

The Bible is full of examples of God taking His hand of blessing off His children who were disobedient to His will and His word.

Proverbs 28:13 →

9. Loss of good health is possible

The Apostle Paul revealed that there were several Believers in the church at Corinth who were experiencing physical weakness and sickness due to their sinful practices.



1 Corinthians 11:30 →

James 5:16 →

10. Loss of physical life prematurely is possible

The New Testament states that there is “a sin unto death”. This happens when Christians continue in sinful practices that tarnish the name of Christ and affect their wellbeing and that of others around them.

1 Corinthians 11:30 →

1 John 5:16 →

11. Loss of sensitivity to sin in your life

Paul says a "seared" conscience can come from continuing in sin and ignoring the Spirit's conviction. This means your sense of right and wrong are no longer working properly.

1 Timothy 4:2 →

12. Chastisement from God in your life circumstances

The Bible says that God will chasten true Believers who choose to continue to live in sin.

Galatians 6:7 →

1 Timothy 6:10 →



Hebrews 12:5-7 →

13. Loss of reward in heaven

Unconfessed sins such as pride or selfish motives in serving God will cause some good deeds to be burned up as "wood, hay, and straw," causing a loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 →

2 Corinthians 5:10 →

All of the above consequences for unconfessed sin should motivate us as a parent, teacher, or discipler to practice confession of sin on a regular basis, as well as teach it to the children and young people we have contact with.

How long has it been since *you* confessed your sin?

IV. Ways to Teach about Confession

A. Through Specific Bible Lessons (make confession your main truth in these lessons):

1. Joseph forgives his brothers
2. Aaron and the golden calf
3. Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses
4. David sins with Bathsheba
5. The Judges series
6. Jesus washes the disciples' feet
7. The parable of two debtors
8. The martyrdom of Stephen



B. Through Special Lessons

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Through Music 🎵

1. Cleanse My Heart Oh God
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

D. Through Making and Using a Counseling Tool about Confession

1. This tool can be made small enough to use with believing children or young people one-on-one.
2. This tool can be made large enough to use before an entire class. You can select which truths to share from week to week.

