

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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SUBJECT: CONFESSING SIN
TITLE: TRUE CONFESSION
TEXT: 1 JOHN 1:8-10

INTRODUCTION. In the Fourth Gospel, John was inspired to record both the glorious teachings and numerous miraculous signs and wonders in order to convince people that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that they might believe and have eternal life through Him (John 20:30-31). The First Epistle of John was written to refute the budding Gnostic heresy which Gentile converts were bringing into the church. Overlaying this purpose is the theme of assurance of salvation. God wants lost people to know Him, and He wants those who are saved to know that they know Him (1 John 2:3).

The answer to Gnosticism, and the answer to New Age religious philosophies (postmodernism) is sound doctrine. We need a good understanding of sin and its consequences, of God's grace, and of the difference between walking in the spirit and walking in the flesh. We are either walking in the light (walking in the Holy Spirit) or we are walking in the darkness of the old sin nature (the indwelling principle of sin). Paul wrote, "All have sinned (past tense) and come short (present tense) of the glory of God" (Rom. 2:23). We were once lost in sin. Today, even though we have been redeemed, we continue to fall short of the glory of God. We commit acts of sin because of the indwelling principle of sin (the old sin nature).

In Justification we were delivered from the eternal penalty of sin through the finished work of Christ. In Sanctification we are being delivered from the power of sin through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Glorification we will be delivered from the presence of sin by our heavenly Father. Right now, today, the Holy Spirit works in a mighty way in the hearts and lives of believers to guide them in forming sound doctrine, and to empower them to live victoriously and witness faithfully for Jesus Christ.

The three verses we are looking at today will help us develop sound doctrine (truth), even as they teach us what to do about sin in the life of the believer.

I. ALL BELIEVERS ARE GUILTY OF SIN, 1:8.

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."

A. Some believers may deny that they have sinned.

1. That is exactly what the some of John's first readers were saying.

This is a condition of the third class, which means that we may say this, or we may not say it. Some Christians may deny that they ever commit acts of sin, or that they have an indwelling principle of sin, or an old sin nature. There are people who insist upon sinless perfection. They believe that if you commit one sin you lose your salvation and must be saved all over again.

We need to be careful in reading First John, because a careless reading might lead some to think John contradicts himself. In the first place this epistle is the product of the mind of the Holy Spirit, not the mind of the apostle. In the second place we must distinguish between the teachings concerning acts of sin and a sinful lifestyle - that is, sinning habitually without repenting.

Many of those who were coming into the church toward the end of the First Century were Gentiles whose world view had been influenced by the budding Gnosticism of the day. Many of those converts were born-again Christians who only sought to walk in the light. They wanted to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). They wanted to know the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).

Others were not genuine converts and many of those would eventually leave the church, but while a part of the church they were having a very negative impact on the fellowship. They were a like a cancerous growth infecting the body of Christ, teaching a false doctrine that led some to flaunt their sin. What some of these people taught was that there was a total separation between the body and the spirit. Spirit is good and matter is evil. When the spirit is saved, they taught, nothing the body does can affect it. Therefore, they could sin all they wanted to and it would have no effect on the spirit. Others seemed to have been teaching that once they were saved the sin principle - the old sin nature - was no longer operating in their lives.

2. Some today may make a similar claim.

Does that mean that we have Gnostics in our church today? We do not have members who are wearing the label, but let me assure you that we have millions today who have been influenced by moral relativism, thanks to the influence of a century of Humanism and New Age religious beliefs. Moral relativism is a basic tenant of Humanism and New Age (Postmodernism today) religious movements. Humanism is a godless, evolutionary atheistic world-view. The New Age religious movements (plural because they have been many and varied) injected Humanism with a spiritual dimension and before the church knew what was happening they were impacting the moral climate of America, including the church.

When New Agers realized that many pastors and other church leaders were onto them, they dropped the term "New Age" in favor of Postmodernism. Not all New Age groups were religious, some were environmental, some social, some political,

some scientific. But New Age religious movements were influenced by Eastern Mysticism, the roots of which go all the way back to Gnosticism - which in turn, may be traced all the way back to ancient Babylonian religious philosophies. So, in reality, there is nothing new about New Age.

Moral relativism is alive and well in America, and it is impacting the church today. How so? There are churches today that have ordained homosexuals, recognized same-sex marriages, and hired homosexuals to serve in various positions within the church. There are churches today that will not permit the pastor to preach against beverage alcohol. There are other churches whose members would be shocked at the thought of ordaining a homosexual, who will not tolerate a pastor who preaches against social drinking, gambling, or questionable entertainment. If you want to get into trouble in a church today, just try to get some of the teenage girls to dress modestly when they go on a church trip. If anything is said, their mothers will go on the attack - and sick their spineless husbands on the pastor! Why call them spineless if they are willing to attack the pastor? First, because they attack in packs. Second, because they are afraid of their wives. Third, they had rather risk placing their daughter in a position that is, shall we say pregnant with temptation, than to admit that they might be tempted by another young lady who wants to dress “sexy”.

Fifty years ago there were some Holiness groups that claimed they “lived above sin.” That is, they never committed individual acts of sin because they had put to death the old sin nature. They denied that the principle of sin was operating in their lives. Today, we are more likely to hear one argument or another that would indicate that many have rationalized sin out of their minds. They are the ones who will readily admit that they have “done something stupid,” but prefer not to think of it in terms of sin, other than to agree that everyone sins. After all, no one is perfect.

James Dopson’s Focus on the Family is reporting that a lot of their counseling today is with church leaders who are addicted to pornography, and to a variety of sins associated with it. This is shocking. I wonder if some people who have been Christians a long time have not decided that they are beyond certain sins, and consequently they open their minds and hearts to the influence of Satan. After all, they might reason, how could I as a mature Christian be affected by looking at porn on the Internet as long as I do not act it out? “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

Recently, James Dopson appeared on Hannity and Combs to answer questions about the Elizabeth Smart kidnaping. Combs asked, and then demanded to know, which is the greater sin, a sexual assault against a child or corporate corruption. This was in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom scandals. Dopson tried to explain the biblical view of sin, but it was obvious that Combs thought he had made his point.

B. If We Say We Have No Sin We Deceive Ourselves.

1. This is the third class condition.

If we say we have no sin - we may say it and we may not - but if we do say it we are deceiving ourselves. God has given us His Word and His Spirit to establish us in sound doctrine. The Ryrie Study Bible Notes state that this is "A reference to the indwelling principle of sin rather than to acts of sin." However, it would seem more accurate to say that because of the indwelling principle of sin we do commit acts of sin. The old sin nature will be with us until we are delivered from the very presence of sin - until we are glorified.

2. If we say we have no sin "we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."

If we deny the sin principle, or if we claim sinless perfection, we are deceiving ourselves mentally. A relationship with Jesus Christ involves the intellect (mind), the emotions (feelings), and the volition (will). It is sad when one over-emphasizes one and de-emphasizes another. Christianity is not a mindless religion. Some seem interested only in feelings, others in the intellectual aspects of Christianity. In reality, we must know that God wants to do, we must have a desire to do it, and we must be willing to do it.

3. There is an answer to this deception.

- a. We must take in sound doctrine to avoid deception.
- b. In Salvation we take in the Person of Christ.

We are saved by grace, through faith, plus nothing, as Paul clearly teaches in Ephesians 2:8-9 and Galatians 2:16. We are saved by the finished work of Christ, not by finishing the work of Christ.

- c. In Sanctification we take in the mind of Christ as the basis for spiritual growth.
- d. This passage will help us to avoid deception (vv. 6-10).

II. IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, GOD WILL FORGIVE US, 1:9.

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

A. Confession of Sin Is an Essential Part of Christianity.

Confession is a combination of two Greek words, *homo*, meaning "same," and *lego*,

meaning "to say." Thus, to confess is to say the same thing about sin that God says about it. Sin that is denied is never forgiven. Sin that is generalized is not confessed. It is one thing to pray, "Lord, forgive us for whatever sins we may have committed this past week." It is quite another to pray, "Dear Lord, I am guilty of hypocrisy. I let someone think I am more faithful to you than I know I am. I mentioned some things I do for your church and they were impressed. I do not do half of what I should be doing. Lord, I hate hypocrisy in anyone else and it certainly no less despicable when I find it in my own heart. I know this dishonors You. I confess this sin to you and beg your forgiveness. I also need your help in resisting that temptation in the future." We may need to confess greed, lust, sins of speech, or another sin.

1. Lost people must confess sin, and repent, trusting Jesus for salvation.
2. Christians need to confess their sins to God daily.
3. The third class condition means that the may or they may not.
4. Those who confess their sins receive forgiveness.
5. Our heavenly Father will deal with those who do not confess their sins.

B. You Can Be Sure God Will Forgive You When You Confess Your Sins to Him.

1. God is faithful.

The more we study and meditate on the attributes of God, the better we understand Him, and the better we understand Him the greater our gratitude will be for all His blessings. God is love, God is holy, God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. We could go on and on with a list of His attributes. But if He were not faithful to His Word, His character, and His nature we could not trust Him to forgive us.

2. He is just.

My brother Mike once made an observation that I have reflected on many times. Mike is a highly regarded attorney in Monroe, LA, a specialist in injury litigation on the defense side. He also does mediation in his own home town, which, according to a local attorney is a high honor. When a plaintiff attorney calls a defense attorney and asks him to mediate a case he must have a lot of confidence in his integrity. Once at lunch several years back, Mike observed that it is amazing how many people there are who have the attitude that if they have a problem, "I just want is day in court." They think that every one who gets his day in court will receive justice. That is the ideal, but that is not always the reality. A lot of things can go wrong, including drawing a judge who has made up his mind before the trial begins. We pray for justice in this world, and I believe that our judicial system is the greatest in the world. But there are miscarriages of justice.

Do you remember the sentence Jim Bakker received a number of years ago? Murders, rapists, and armed robbers have gotten off with lighter sentences. I was no fan of Jim Bakker or the PTL Club, but the sentence was a gross miscarriage of justice. Later, and appeals court agreed and reduced his sentenced.

I can think of nothing that inspires greater confidence in God or my position in Him than the fact that He is faithful and just in all things. Always and forever, He is faithful and just.

3. He forgives the sins we confess.

4. He also cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

This is important. How do I know that all my sins are forgiven? For that matter, how do I know that I have confessed all my sins? What about that time a few days ago when for just a moment I experienced what might have been covetousness - or was I just tempted? Was I guilty of lust, or did I resist the temptation in time? Was I really jealous of my friend, or was I just tempted? What if I had an opportunity to witness for the Lord and missed it, was that sin?

There is good news! If you confess the sins you know you are guilty of, God will forgive those sins - and He will cleanse you of all unrighteousness. You have His word on it.

III. IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE NOT SINNED, WE MAKE HIM A LIAR, 1:10.

A. Some May Claim They Have Not Sinned.

This is the third class condition. Someone may actually make that claim. In fact, there have been churches that insisted that one could live above sin. I think it might have been the great evangelist, Billy Sunday, who said, "The only way you can live above sin is to rent a room above a barroom."

B. If We Claim We Have Not Sinned We Are Calling God a Liar.

God has said that all have sinned (in the past), and that all continue to fall short of the glory of God, which is sin. In spite of what God says, there might still be someone who says he or she does not sin - ever. It is bad enough to call another person a liar, but it is really a serious matter to call God a liar.

C. If We Claim We Have Not Sinned His Word Is Not In Us.

No one who is grounded in the Word of God would make such a claim, yet some

who deny that they ever sin also profess a special insight in to the Word of God. The surest sign that one does not understand the Word of God is his claim that he never sins. We are not talking about lost people who cannot be expected to know the Word of God, but people who profess to be Christians.

CONCLUSION. There is no forgiveness when there is no confession of sin. To be forgiven we need to confess our sins and seek forgiveness and restoration. We must also ask the Lord to so fill us with His Spirit that we will be able to resist the temptations that we have not resisted in the past. There is never a day that we do not need to bow humbly before the Lord confess our sin and ask Him to remove anything that will hinder fellowship with Him. Is there not some sin you need to confess to God right now?

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

INVITATION.