

Lesson 11: Cleansing the Past

Intro

In the last lesson we saw that repentance is not just an outward religious exercise but a change of attitude toward sin and God. Instead of justifying our sin we feel a deep sadness and sorrow not just about our sinful deeds but about our sinful hearts. Instead of running away from God, we turn back to Him. Let us not forget that only the Holy Spirit can work this transformation in us. Our part in repentance is keeping our hearts open to His work in us. In this lesson we will explore an important result of genuine repentance, namely confession of our sins.



Matthew
3:2,6

John the Baptist called the people to repentance. What was the result of repentance in the lives of those people?

Here we read something extremely important. True repentance always leads to confession of our sins.



Leviticus 5:5

In the Old Testament, when the Israelites realized they had sinned what were they to do?

It was not only about bringing a sin offering. Without confessing their sin, the offering would have been useless.



Isaiah
43:24-25

In order to fully comprehend the importance of confession, it is imperative that we truly understand what sin does. The following verses, found in the book of Isaiah, describe what our sin does to God. What answer do you find in the text?

God says that our sin causes him to be burdened and wearied. In other words, our sin doesn't just affect us. Our sin also weighs down God! When we confess our sins, we are released from the burden of carrying those sins and more importantly God finds relief. This is why God says, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions *for My own sake...*" It is a deep need for God that we confess our sins so that he can take them from us.

How does it make you feel to know that your sins burden God and make Him sad?



Isaiah 44:22

What comparison does Isaiah use to describe our sins? What does this comparison bring across?

What must we do in order to experience forgiveness?

What will drive the thick cloud away?

Unconfessed sins are like a thick cloud that block our view of God and of our fellow man. We can no longer see clearly and judge things correctly. We make the wrong decisions and disorientedly head in the wrong direction. Just like thick fog can only be pierced and dissipated by the sun, we receive forgiveness only through Jesus Christ. Trying to eliminate our guilt without Jesus' intervention is like trying to burn off the fog with our own power.

Another important point is made very clear in this passage. Forgiveness of sin brings redemption. God says, "Return to Me, for I have redeemed you." He does not just want to forgive our sins. He wants to restore our relationship to Him. Confessing our sins only makes sense in the context of surrendering our lives to Christ. How could forgiveness of a particular sin help us if we continue to sin and choose to be separated from God? The biggest sin that we can commit is to ignore God and not accept the salvation that Jesus offers us. Jesus could forgive thousands of individual sins, but when the SIN that is the root of all sins is left untouched and unconfessed we continue to live in guilt and condemnation.



Psalms 32:1-8

David knew what it was like to live with an unconfessed sin that burdened and sickened his life. He also experienced the freedom and forgiveness that comes from confession. He described this experience very clearly in Psalm 32.

How does David describe what happens to us after we confess our sins? (Verses 1-2)

What happened to David when he tried to cover up his sin? (Verses 3-4)

Think about a time in your life when you carried the burden of guilt. What did the guilt do to you as long as it was not cleansed?

What did David do to get rid of his guilt? (Verse 5)

What did God do as a result? (Verse 5)

What is the result of forgiveness? (Verses 6-8,11)



Sometimes situations arise when it is very hard to confess our sins. What consequences do unconfessed sins have on our life (Spiritually, Mentally, Emotionally, and Physically)?



1 John

1:8 – 2:1

What happens when we don't confess our sins and try to cover them up? (Verses 8 and 10)

What does God promise to do when we confess our sins? (Verse 9)

What assurance do we have that our confessed sins are forgiven? (Verse 1)

It is important to remember that confessing our sins isn't a onetime event that happens when we first come to Jesus. Even in our Christian walk we will fall down and become burdened with sin. We will continue to be in need of forgiveness and have to confess our sins to God. If we don't the guilt will choke our spiritual life. The best time to confess is when the Holy Spirit is prompting us and making us aware of the sin in our lives. The longer we carry around the burden of unforgiven sin the more our relationship to God and others is damaged.

Jesus our Advocate

Just like the sinner in the Old Testament, whose sin was confessed onto the sacrificial animal and in turn symbolically transferred by the priest onto the Sanctuary, so it is when Jesus takes on our sin burden and intercedes on our behalf for our forgiveness before the Father in the Heavenly Sanctuary. Forgiveness is only made possible because Jesus is our High Priest in Heaven.



**Proverbs
28:13**

What does Solomon say about the importance of confessing our sins?

What goes hand in hand with confessing our sins?

Solomon talks about confession and forsaking our sins. So we see that confessing our sins is not just saying we are sorry, taking advantage of God's mercy, and then continuing to do the same thing as before. Unfortunately, some think it's quite that simple. Just do a quick confession and then you are guilt-free. Those who abuse God's goodness and mercy by looking lightly upon their sin, have much more to

confess than just their acts of sin. They need to repent and confess their false and fatal attitude toward sin.

Quote #1

“Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away. This will be the result of genuine sorrow for sin.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 39*)



According to James, to whom should we confess our sins?

James 5:16

The Bible tells us in many passages that we should confess our sins to God. But when we have sinned against our fellow man, it is just as important to confess our sin to them and ask for their forgiveness. Our confession reveals how real our sorrow is and becomes the new foundation for a better relationship with them.

Quote #2

“Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God, because the brother you have wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you sinned against his Creator and Redeemer.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 37*)

What happens when the other person does not want to forgive?

When you have confessed your sin to someone but they do not want to forgive you, you still stand justified before God. However, the other person is accountable to God for his unforgiving spirit. Jesus said in the sermon on the mount that people who are unforgiving will not have their sins forgiven. (Matthew 6:15)

Quote #3

“True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 38*)



Think about it: Why is it important that we specifically confess our sins to God and to the person you sinned against?

Re-read the last quote from “Steps to Christ”. What do we learn from it about whom we should confess our sins to?

It is important that we confess our sins in a way that is correct for the situation. There are situations when confessing sins publicly, such as unclean thoughts, will trigger unclean thoughts in the mind of the hearer. On the other hand, sins that affect the entire church need to be confessed in front of the whole church.

Quote #4 “Confession of sin, whether public or private, should be heartfelt and freely expressed. It is not to be urged from the sinner. It is not to be made in a flippant and careless way, or forced from those who have no realizing sense of the abhorrent character of sin.” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 38)

Quote #5 “His confessions are not sincere and in earnest. To every acknowledgment of his guilt he adds an apology in excuse of his course, declaring that if it had not been for certain circumstances he would not have done this or that for which he is reproved...The spirit of self-justification originated in the father of lies and has been exhibited by all the sons and daughters of Adam. Confessions of this order are not inspired by the divine Spirit and will not be acceptable to God. True repentance will lead a man to bear his guilt himself and acknowledge it without deception or hypocrisy. Like the poor republican, not lifting up so much as his eyes unto heaven, he will cry, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner,’ and those who do acknowledge their guilt will be justified, for Jesus will plead His blood in behalf of the repentant soul. The examples in God’s word of genuine repentance and humiliation reveal a spirit of confession in which there is no excuse for sin or attempt at self-justification.” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 40-41)



Re-read the last two quotes and then write down what they say about the attitude of someone confessing his/her sin?

The attitude of the heart is important!	If we confess our sins with the right attitude then we will not belittle, excuse, or justify them. We will not try to make our sin look better by pointing to other people's faults. Rather, we will honestly admit where we have sinned.
Why is confession so important?	<p>Think about it! Why is it so important to confess our sins specifically? Isn't it enough to just ask in general for forgiveness without worrying about the details? After all, God does not need us to confess each sin to know the wrong we have done. Maybe not, but we do! Here is why:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Greek word for <i>confess</i> means <i>to be in agreement with someone</i>. When we confess our sins to God we are agreeing that He is just and that we have been unjust. We acknowledge His righteous judgment over our sin. We are thus declaring bankruptcy and asking God for His help.• When we confess we place in the hand of Christ strong arguments against Satan, the one who is accusing us before God (Revelation 12:10b). The accusations of Satan stand therefore without weight because a guilty person who confesses his sin can justly receive justification and mercy from God (Psalm 51:3).• It is only when we specifically confess our sins that God can forgive us and give us victory over these sins.• Confession of sins brings healing. Just like sin can burden us spiritually, mentally, physically, and emotionally, confessing our sins takes that burden of guilt from us and gives us a clear conscience.
Confession means...	<p>Let us review what all is entailed in confessing our sins!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We clearly call out sin by name without making excuses.• We not only admit what we have done, but accept the sinful nature of our heart that makes the new birth a necessity.• We show our willingness to truly give up the sin and ask Jesus to free us from our sinful habits.• We surrender our lives to Jesus.
To make amends	In addition to confessing, we often have things to make right again. For example, we should return stolen things with interest (Leviticus 5:21-24; Numbers 5:5-8, Lukas 19:8) and try to make amends for the damage that we have caused.
Cleansing the past	It is helpful to take time and ask God to show us where we have sinned. We can then write down all the unconfessed sins that God brings to our attention. We can consider prayerfully which sins we should confess to others and in which cases we need to make amends. We can ask God for His strength to follow through. This will be a very freeing experience because we can have the assurance that these sins are forgiven and that we do not need to confess them a second time.
Questions...	The following questions are not by any means a complete list of all possible sins. There are many ways that we sin against God and others. So, it isn't possible to create a "sin catalog". However, these questions can help us remember the sins that we have committed. Maybe we can discover sins that still have their grasp on us today. With God's help you can have forgiveness and experience freedom from these sins!

A. Sins against God

- (1) Other things or persons are/were more important to me than God. ()
- (2) I worshipped or honored the crucifix, pictures of Jesus, or other saints (including Mary). ()
- (3) I used God's name disrespectfully. ()
- (4) I swore falsely in God's name. ()
- (5) I did not keep God's Sabbath day holy. ()

B. Sins against other people

- (1) I have not shown my parents the honor they deserve. ()
- (2) I have neglected my parents. ()
- (3) I do not make sufficient time for my family. ()
- (4) I have treated my children unjustly or even abused them. ()
- (5) I have treated my siblings, relatives, or friends unjustly. ()
- (6) I have killed or injured someone. ()
- (7) I harbored feelings of hatred or revenge towards someone. ()
- (8) I have not forgiven someone. ()
- (9) I have/have had extramarital sexual affairs. ()
- (10) I have/have had premarital sexual affairs. ()
- (11) I do not give the proper attention to my marriage as I should. ()
- (12) I dwell on thoughts of other men or women. ()
- (13) I have molested or sexually abused a child, man, or woman. ()
- (14) I had an abortion. ()
- (15) I made or encouraged a woman to have an abortion. ()
- (16) I stole something. ()
- (17) I lied or deceived someone. ()
- (18) I took advantage of someone in a business transaction. ()
- (19) I lied or was deceptive regarding my taxes to the government. ()
- (20) I have unlawfully or deceptively received grants or tax breaks from the state, government, or an institution. ()
- (21) I willfully lied to others. ()
- (22) I twist, spin, overdramatize, or downplay the truth. ()
- (23) I slandered someone else's character. ()

C. Sins against myself

- (1) I damage my health. ()
- (2) I masturbate. ()
- (3) I look at pornographic literature or movies or similar things. ()
- (4) I invest too much time in my hobbies. ()
- (5) I watch too much television or movies. ()
- (6) I read worthless literature (novels, science fiction, etc.). ()

**NO FISHING
ALLOWED!**

When we repent and confess our sins, we can be assured that God forgives us, because He promised us: "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). It is important to understand that forgiveness is not dependent on our feelings. Even when we do not feel forgiven, this does not change the fact that God has forgiven us. God's forgiveness is something you can depend upon: "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression...He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19)

**God's
promise to
you!**

Please once again write out the promise found in 1 John 1: 9!

Quote #6

"As you draw near to Him with confession and repentance, He will draw near to you with mercy and forgiveness." (*Steps to Christ, p. 55*)

Don't Forget!

God longs to forgive your sins and to take the burden of sin from your heart that keeps you from living the life that God has prepared for you. Do not allow unforgiven sin to stand between you and the awesome plan that God has for your life! God's forgiveness sets you free to experience the wonderful life that He has in store for you!

