

Reconciling with One Another: Confession, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

Practically speaking, how do we practice biblical reconciliation. Let me give you a simple outline. There are three basic steps of reconciliation. Step one: Confess your sin. Step two: Ask for forgiveness. Step three: Grant forgiveness. Simple! Very simple outline. So hard to practice! But step one, main point: Confess your sin. Confess your sin. James 5:16, write that down. James 5:16. James commands us, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." What a great verse! "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." You know what confession of sin is? It's dealing with the past. It's dealing with the negative. You know what praying for one another is? That's going in a positive direction. Prayer for other people, you know what that is? That's genuine love.

To pray for someone, you've had a conflict with, that's hard. To pray for someone is love. Confess your sins to one another, that's dealing with the negative, the past. Pray for

one another, that's, that's the positive command, that's, that's pursuing the future. That you may be healed that's the result of that. Confession of sin, prayer for one another; those are the ways we work out love for each other. That's what marks our fellowship in the body of Christ. But when we sin against each other, if we sin against each other and we don't confess those sins, we incur from God a temporal punishment for those sins.

There were a number of sinful people in the Corinthian church who were failing to deal with their sins and particularly at the Lord's Table. They were coming to the Lord's Table with unconfessed sin. Paul pointed out what they all knew, their failure to examine themselves before coming to the Lord's Table to partake of the, the bread and the cup. That's why in 1 Corinthians 11:30, "why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." Temporal punishments. God was inflicting disobedient Christians with punishment, some quite severe, for failing to deal with their sins before coming to celebrate the Lord's Supper. It's serious! James is describing the same thing as something we need to be healed from. It's unclear as to whether he's talking about a spiritual issue, physical malady, but it's a temporal punishment, a form of temporal punishment sent by God because we've refused to confess our sins to God and to one another. He's gracious. He uses those punishments to awaken us.

I believe that many of the maladies that people face today, often psychologized and often given drugs for, I believe that so much could be solved if we just confessed our sins to one another and pray for each other because you know what will happen? God says he'll heal. Again, that's why Jesus said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you," that is to say, God brings to mind an unresolved sin between you and another Christian, stop your worship. "First be reconciled and then," and only then, "return to worship God," but now with a clear conscience, now with no sin, no bitterness, no anger, no hatred, no jealousy, nothing hindering your worship. That's one way to become conscious of your sin; when, when God brings something to mind.

Another way God brings something to mind is when someone comes to confront you in your sin. That's what's going on in Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've gained your brother." So that's another way to become conscious of your sins, when a fellow Christian comes to you and says, hey, I think you've sinned in this way. God's doing that. Notice the concern for keeping the matter private between you and him alone. That's very important. Most sin in the body can

be dealt with just like that, just with a conversation, confessing sin, following these steps, very simple.

So let's say you believe you've got something like that in hand. You believe that there is a sin; whether it's yours or someone else's, you believe you may need to reconcile with someone over some issue. Let's lay down a few guidelines, and I guess you can call these subpoints under step number one: Confess your sins and there's a sub-point A. Clarify whether or not this is truly a sin. Clarify whether or not it's truly a sin. If it's a sin, you need to confess it. If it's not, you don't need to confess it as a sin. Fair enough? But you say, okay, how do I know whether or not something I did is a sin? Man, I've got something that's bothering my conscience a little bit, or something, you know, someone's brought something to me and said, hey, I think you did this. How do I know whether or not that's truly a sin? Just because they say it's a sin doesn't mean it is.

Just because it's bothering my mind doesn't mean it's necessarily a sin, does it? So how do you know? That's easy. Open your Bible, find chapter and verse. If it's listed in the Bible as a sin, and you did it, take the hit. It's okay. We all do it. It's called a sin. Admit it. In the words of the

Westminster Shorter Catechism, "a sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God." You ever do anything like that? Any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God?

Here are a few verses we can keep in mind. Let's start with the Ten Commandments. "Honor your father and your mother." Any want of conformity or transgression of that? Exodus 20 verse 13, "You shall not murder." Now, remember Jesus took murder down to a heart level, didn't he? He said, "If you're angry with your brother, you've committed murder in your heart." So don't say, well, there are no bodies buried in my backyard. I'm good! Been angry? Had unrighteous anger in your heart? You've been guilty of that.

Exodus 20:14, "You shall not commit adultery." Again, remember, looking with lust, adultery of the heart. "You shall not steal." You say, well, I don't steal anything. Okay, wait a couple of commandments, Exodus 20:16, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." And if you say, I haven't stolen, be careful, you've probably borne false witness about that, so Exodus 20:17, "You shall not," here it goes, "covet your neighbor's house, wife, servants, animals," anything that belongs to your neighbor. Stealing? Maybe you didn't do it on a

hand-level; maybe you didn't grab somebody's wallet and put it in your back pocket. But if you've ever coveted what they have, reputation, you coveted their money, you've coveted their position, status, oh, yeah, you're guilty.

What about the other side of the Westminster's definition of sin, that want of conformity to the law? When we fail to conform to Ephesians 4:26, we fail to be discriminating about our speech. That's want of conformity to this law. We have to submit every word that proceeds out of our mouths to this criteria. Number one: Is it good for edification? Number two: Does it edify for the need of the moment? Number three: Does it give grace to those who hear it? Look, if not, that's want of conformity to the law, and we are once again guilty because we have not conformed to what God commanded us to do clearly. Look, we just don't know how deep our sin goes. We're just so superficial, so trivial about our life and our sin before a holy God. He does bring things to mind for us to confess, but there's so much that we do that don't even, we're not even aware of. But his grace covers that, we'll get to that in a second.

If the issue under question is a biblically identifiable as a sin, if it's any failure to conform to God's law, or if it's a violation of God's law, then it's a sin. And you can proceed to

sub-point letter B, sub-point B: Clarify whether or not this sin is known to others. Clarify whether or not this sin is known to others. Look, if it's a sin of the heart and the mind, that's not something you want to confess publicly, but if it's a sin that you've, has had a social effect, others know about, confess that one publicly, to the person. Usually, a good rule of thumb is to ask the question, can you take a picture of it or can you record it on audio? If so, then you need to deal with this issue that's become known to somebody else or to other people. Sexual sins like fornication or adultery; sins of the tongue like gossip, slander, spreading false reports, even grumbling, complaining; sins of anger like an outburst of anger, impatient words, unkind words, all those things are things you can take a picture of or record or both, and you need to deal with them. But when they're internal sins, sins only God knows about, those sins between you and God, like pride, maybe some anger, confess them to him. Okay? Don't drag those out publicly.

I remember when I was a young Christian, very zealous to please the Lord, but not very well taught on this principle. I was working at a college student union building with a number of state employees. One in particular was incurably lazy, an embarrassment to the male gender. I struggled daily to be around this guy. I had angry thoughts and resentment about his

laziness, which was, was true, he was lazy, but I had judged him to be a somewhat worthless human being, which is a bad thought, I know. I admit it. In my prayer time, I became convicted of that thought, of my sinful thoughts toward him, which is a good thing. I confessed those thoughts to God, which was good. But then I confessed them to this man, who up to that point had no idea of the sins of the mind, and I said something like this, Mr. So-and-So, I need to confess that I have resented you because you are so lazy in the workplace. I've been sinfully angry over that fact. Will you please forgive me? The look on his face said it all. He sputtered out some word of forgiveness. Right intention on my part, but terrible execution. And I learned at that poor man's expense not to do that.

So first, clarify whether or not this sin is truly a sin, and if it is a sin, clarify whether or not this sin is known. Make a distinction between a sin that's public and a sin of the thought life. It's a, if it's an outward sin, then we're going to go to subpoint C: Confess your sin to God, the one you've ultimately offended. Confess your sin to God, the one you've ultimately offended. Turn to 1 John 1:9 because that's where we sin this principle so clearly explained for us. 1 John 1:9 you probably know from memory, especially if you're a grown-up AWANA kid. "If we confess your sins, he is faithful and just to

forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful.” Faithful to what?

Faithful to his promise to forgive his children. “Faithful and he is just.” Just? Why does justice enter into there? Because we already talked about the ministry of reconciliation, for God did not overlook our sins, but he was just to deal with our sins. So he’s faithful to his holy character, and he is just, consistent with his holy character “to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The word confess; it’s the Greek word, *homologeó*, which literally means *homoú*, same, and *légō*, to say or to speak. It literally it means, to say the same as. In other words, we are, when we confess, we are to say the same thing about our sin as God says about our sin.

Because you’ve clarified the nature of this issue, that it is biblically identified as a sin, you know what it’s called. Use his language. This matter is an instance of the want of conformity unto the transgression of the law of God, and use the words that God has used to identify that when you confess. That is, to say, first of all, don’t call it, I made a mistake. It’s not a mistake. It’s a sin. So call it a sin. Take responsibility for that thing. And secondly, don’t use worldly terms that are often filled with psychological baggage. That is to say, don’t

confess your OCD, your obsessive compulsion disorder or whatever.

If it's sin, I mean if your just washing your hands too much, that's okay just to have clean hands. Okay? But if it's truly a sin, identify the sin, whether it's a matter of self-centeredness or trying to control yourself or other people or circumstances. Perhaps it's pride that's causing you to be what they call OCD, wanting everything to look perfect all the time. Don't blame OCD. Blame yourself. Blame your sin. Take responsibility for your sin. And don't confess alcoholism or substance abuse. That's the language of disease and recovery. That's not biblical language. Confess the biblical sin of drunkenness. Don't excuse your sins, like lack of self-control, lack of self-discipline. Don't blame them on your parents, your dysfunctional family, faulty wiring, bad biology. Don't use the therapeutic, blame-shifting language of this godless, secular age.

Listen, it is so important to take responsibility for your sin. Why? Because when we take responsibility for our sins before God, we have hope. We have hope! He offers grace for salvation, grace for mind-renewal, grace for life-transformation. But if we excuse our sin and re-categorize it,

if we don't deal with it, there is no hope. It's just perpetual recovery, continuing treatment, managing, coping. That's all you're left with. The therapy professions will tell you all the time that there is no full and final deliverance from these conditions, disorders, diseases. Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic. You're just either on the wagon or off of it. That's not hopeful. You're either in recovery or you've fallen off the wagon. There's no hope or true healing in the world of biology and psychology, just coping and managing, that's it. No remedy for all those conditions.

But that's not the biblical promise. The biblical promise of 1 John 1:9 offers this hope. If we confess our, not disorders, not conditions, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If we'll submit to God's Word, if we'll define these issues like God defines them, if we'll use his terms and not the world's words, words like sin and unrighteousness, you know what? We can find forgiveness for our sins, and we can find cleansing from our unrighteousness. What's the distinction there? That is, if there's a sin that God brings to mind and you confess it, he'll forgive that. But when he says he will "cleanse us from all unrighteousness," that's all the stuff you've done between the last time you confessed and this

time that you don't even know about it. He'll wipe all that away, too. Isn't that awesome?

Now, look, all known sin must be confessed to God, right, whether it's public or private. Why? Because everything is public before a God who sees everything. So we confess everything that comes to mind because "everything is open and laid bare before God," and all of our sins, get this, all of our sins are against God and God alone. First of all, 2 Samuel 12:13, 2 Samuel 12:13, and also Psalm 51:4. Psalm 51:4. This is the incident of David and Bathsheba and him coming to a knowledge of his sin. You may remember, David committed horrible sin in this matter of Uriah the Hittite, Uriah's wife Bathsheba. He committed adultery with Bathsheba while Uriah was out fighting one of David's wars. Then he tried to cover over the resulting pregnancy. David had his commander Joab put Uriah in an exposed position on the battlefield which guaranteed his death. It was tricky, but actually the term is murder. That's what he did. He killed Uriah.

He murdered Uriah to cover over his own sin, and then he lied about it. Psalm 51:4, David confesses to God, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." Are you for real? Uriah's dead, Bathsheba's pregnant,

having a baby, and you've sullied the entire kingdom with your sin. You're going to tell me, "Against you and you only have I sinned?" How could he say that? There's no flippancy on David's part. There's no audacity. Psalm 51:4 is an incredibly accurate confession, and it helps us to understand the true nature of sin. We learn in James 4:12 that there is "only one lawgiver and judge, and he is able to save and to destroy." In other words, it's not Uriah, Bathsheba, or Joab who gave those commands, "You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Who gave those commands? God did. God is the only law-giver. He is the only judge. He is the only one able to save and to destroy.

Therefore, all sin is ultimately and finally against God and God alone. David is accountable to God in the sin that he committed. David would have responsibility to confess his sin to the living: to Bathsheba, to Joab, to his servants. Uriah, though, is dead. He can't confess to him; can't reconcile with him and the only justice that comes as a result of that is what God possesses and doles out.

Okay, so you've clarified this issue as a sin. You realize it's a sin that needs to be confessed, and it needs to be confessed to God. But you also, subpoint D, confess your sin to

the human being that you've offended, provided you haven't murdered that person and you can't go and get them and talk to them. Confess your sin to the human being that you've offended. In the same way that you identified that sin as sin before God, use biblical terms to identify it to him, do the same thing with the human being that you've offended. So husband, say to your wife, Wife, I have violated Colossians 3:19, what it warned me against. That verse says "Husbands, love your wives," and do not be harsh with them. Honey, I've sinned by being harsh with you yesterday, when I said thus-and-such. Wife, say to your husband, husband, I have violated Ephesians 5:33, where God commands me to respect you. He had to command me to respect you because... Never mind. I disrespected you in front of the kids this morning when I said thus-and-such. That was a sin. Parents, say to your children, kids, we've violated God's Word in Ephesians 6:4, which tells us not to provoke you to anger. We realize that by cutting you off, not allowing you to speak, being harsh with you, snapping at you, putting unrealistic expectations on you, or whatever it is, it was sinful. Get the picture?

Confess your sins to one another. Just as applicable in the body of Christ as well. We have to be about this business of confessing our sins to one another. What is so difficult about confessing our sin? It's back to that root sin of pride, isn't

it? Oh, we hate to admit when we're wrong, but we are. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the 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 Christ 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." That's the principle in Proverbs 28:13, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble."

So this is so easy, this first step. Step 1: Confess your sin. This is so easy; just, just humble yourself. Confess your sin, remember whom you truly are before a holy and righteous God, that before him we are completely undone. And then come before one another in meekness, in humility, and confess your sin. God will bless you. There is no shame in your confession. The shame is attached to your sinning. If you've sinned, that's shameful; that's where the shame resides. Confession, righteous! God smiles on you when you confess your sins to one another. It's a holy thing.