

## **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS.**

– DEC. 19. – 1 JOHN 1:5-2:6. –

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." – 1 Jno. 1:9.

**THE** Apostle's address is not to unbelievers, unjustified persons, "sinners" in the ordinary sense of the word; on the contrary, he is addressing the justified and sanctified in Christ Jesus, and he classes himself with these, using the plural pronoun "we." The frequent mistake of applying this and similar passages to sinners in general has been injurious in two particulars:

(1) It has been injurious to the unregenerate, in that it has given some the impression that there is no difference between the Church and the world; and that all alike have access to God in prayer and for the forgiveness of daily trespasses. It has thus hindered some from realizing the necessity of faith in the atonement, and from definitely entering into covenant relationship with the Lord under the terms of the New Covenant. On the contrary all should be clearly informed of the fact that repentance and a particular, positive acceptance of Christ as their personal Savior are absolutely necessary, before they can "be accepted in the Beloved," and be treated as "sons of God," and enjoy the privileges of this relationship, – prayer, fellowship with God, divine care or providential oversight of their affairs and interests, and the favor of forgiveness of daily trespasses through the merit of the great High Priest.

(2) This oversight has had an injurious effect upon some Christians who have gone to the extreme of claiming that they can never commit sin, after their past sins have been graciously forgiven by the Lord, and after they have entered into the New Covenant relationship. Hence, we have the very wrong views and teachings of so-called "perfectionists" who claim, not merely that they

are *reckonedly* perfect now, but that they are *actually* perfect in all their thoughts, words and deeds, – deceiving themselves and laying themselves liable to many grievous errors, as the Apostle declares in this connection. – Verses 8,10.

The object of the Apostle John in writing this epistle he clearly states, saying, "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." It is a noteworthy fact that the vast majority of Christians never [R2235 : page 311] experience the *fulness* of joy and peace and blessing that they might possess. Too many are content with simply diluted first principles of the doctrine of Christ; and, as the Apostle Paul declares, such are merely "babes in Christ." They have a blessing of course in any relationship to the Lord, but they have not the fulness of joy which would be theirs if they progressed in grace and in knowledge "to the full stature of a man in Christ." The object of the Apostle's writing them was to stir up the pure minds of believers to an appreciation and enjoyment of their privileges, that thereby they might grow and develop.

The Apostle follows the example of our Lord Jesus in symbolizing truth and righteousness as Light, and sin and every evil way as so much of opposing Darkness. God himself thus considered would be the very perfection of light, – "in him is no darkness," no sin, no imperfection. With this thought before the mind, the Apostle points out that any growth of fellowship with God which we may aspire to, must be along the lines of truth, goodness, purity; and he points out that it would be sin for us to say to others or to imagine in our own hearts that we are walking with God and having fellowship with him, if our course of life is a dark, a sinful one. Such are merely deceiving themselves and others: they are not deceiving God, and they are not getting the blessings of those who do "walk in the light."

Moreover, to the extent that we walk in the light and in harmony and fellowship with God, we will find ourselves in fellowship with all others who are like-minded. So then, if we do not "love the brethren,

whom we have seen," so as to be able to have fellowship and spiritual pleasure with them, that would be an indication that we are not wholly in harmony and fellowship with God. But who are the "brethren?" Our Lord tells us that not all who profess his name are true brethren; he says, "Not everyone that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven [be recognized as his brethren and joint-heirs], but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." We thus see that it is by our deeds and not merely by our professions that we are accepted of the Lord who again says, "Who are my brethren?... Verily, I say unto you he that doeth the will of my Father the same is my brother." – Matt. 7:21; 12:50.

So then, we are not to anticipate "fellowship" with all who name the name of Christ as a proof of fellowship with the Father, and that we are in the light: we are merely to anticipate this *true* fellowship with those who are earnestly seeking to do the Father's will, to serve his cause and exemplify the instructions of his Word, in their deeds as well as in their professions. Between all such there must be, whether hidden or open, a *bond of fellowship* and union – that bond is the one faith and one baptism into the one Lord.

But while this fellowship between us and the Lord and all who have his spirit is based upon our walking in the light, our following in his footsteps to the extent of our ability, nevertheless it does not imply absolute freedom from the imperfection of sin; altho under the New Covenant arrangement nothing is charged up to us as sin except in proportion as it has been *wilfully* done. Nevertheless, because of the manifold temptations, and the weakness of our flesh, the result of inherited predisposition toward sin, it is impossible for us to avoid "short-comings" and faults. These may be properly termed sins as in this lesson, because "sin is a transgression of the law," however unintentional. But the divine arrangement under the New Covenant, on behalf of the Lord's people, is that these *unintentional* faults and short-comings need not be charged up against us as sins; but instead may be cleansed away upon our application to the Great High Priest,

through the merit of the precious blood. Thus it is that the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord cleanseth us from all sin – keeps us clean from sin, if realizing our imperfections we continually make application for forgiveness.

The Apostle uses the word "sin" in a different sense than the above, further on in this epistle, saying (3:6-9), "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him nor [even] known him...He that committeth sin is of the devil... Whosoever is begotten of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is begotten of God." Again he says (5:18), "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not."

In these passages the Apostle uses the word "sin" in its full or absolute sense, meaning wilful sin, deliberate sin, intentional sin; sins that are not merely short-comings and faults, due largely or wholly to the imperfections of the flesh, inherited from our ancestors. No one, the Apostle assures us, who has been begotten of the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of holiness and truth, could have any sympathy with sin so as to wilfully, knowingly and intentionally engage therein. All who so love sin and wilfully do it and approve it after they have a knowledge of the truth, are children of darkness who love darkness and who thus show that they have the spirit or disposition of Satan.

But let us return to the consideration of the other use of the word "sin" as found in this lesson, applying the term to the faults and imperfections which God's people are zealously striving against, and seeking to stamp out of their mortal bodies, and against which they are continually fighting a good fight and coming off conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. The Apostle intimates that there is danger that some will go to the extreme of denying that they have any faults, and thus deceive themselves and get into a snare of the adversary. It may be

asked, What difference can it make if they are seeking to live **[R2235 : page 312]** godly, whether they claim to live perfectly, or admit that they are imperfect and apply continually for cleansing through the precious blood. We reply that it makes a great difference: only as we confess our sins can they be forgiven, consequently those who deny that they have any sins, faults, imperfections, have a great load of them uncanceled, unforgiven, charged up against them; and because of this they would be accounted unworthy to be taken further along in the path of light, under the lead of the holy spirit, into the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of the love and wisdom of God, as revealed in his Word as meat in due season for the household of faith. Thus we see that there is but the one proper course of faith and conduct, in which we may have a complete fellowship with the Lord: those who take any other course are making God a liar, and he would not fellowship with them, but he will leave them to the darkness of their own way. Can we wonder then that so many are in darkness and lack evidences of fellowship with God, when we see how few confess their faults and seek to overcome them and to be cleansed in the only way of divine appointment?

These things are written not to cultivate in us the thought that we may sin with impunity, and be overtaken with faults through carelessness and inattention to the divine Word, and then go to the Lord for forgiveness. Quite to the contrary, these assurances of divine favor and willingness to forgive are designed to have upon our hearts a mellowing influence which will **[R2236 : page 312]** make us all the more careful to avoid sin, and to maintain fellowship with him who is the perfection of light and holiness. "These things are written that we sin not;" that we become not boastful of self, self-righteous, self-justified, and thus abominable in the Lord's sight: but that, fleeing from our weaknesses and imperfections, we lay hold upon the grace of God in Christ for their forgiveness, and for grace and strength increasingly to fight a good fight against sin.

"If any man [in Christ] sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Here again, "*any man*" does not refer to those who are out of Christ, but to those who are under the terms and conditions of the New Covenant. Such alone are addressed in this Epistle. The world has no Advocate with the Father, because it has not accepted Christ, and he is the Advocate only for those who have accepted him and who are striving to overcome sin.

Our Advocate is more than an advocate, more than a representative at the bar of divine justice, interested in our welfare and forgiveness; he is in addition the one who gave himself for us, who at Calvary finished the work of making a propitiation (*satisfaction*) for our sins. This is the reason why we may come "with boldness to the throne of grace," not only realizing that God is for us, and that our Lord Jesus sympathizes with and is our Advocate, but also and specially realizing the merit of the sacrifice which he has already paid to Justice, and which he has made fully applicable on behalf of all who love and obey him, on application.

But, says the Apostle, he is the propitiation not merely for our sins (the Church's sins), but "*also for the sins of the whole world.*" What does this mean? Is he the Advocate for the whole world? No; not yet. The world has not yet been called and drawn to holiness and truth. During the present age "no man can come unto Christ except the Father *draw him.*" And this drawing influence of the truth is at present extended only to "*him that hath an ear to hear.*" A great mass of mankind have never heard in any sense of the word of the grace of God, and of the propitiation and forgiveness, provided for all in Christ. Indeed, it is a remarkably small number who "have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

Yet so surely as the propitiation was made "*for* the sins of the whole world," just so surely shall every member of mankind be brought to a knowledge of the fact, and to an opportunity to avail himself of the provided blessing. It is to this end that the great

Millennial age has been promised and is being prepared for: and it is concerning that age of blessing to "all the families of the earth" that the Lord declares through the prophet "In that day the blind eyes shall be opened and the deaf ears shall be unstopped." It is of that time that our Lord Jesus also declared, "And I, if I be lifted up, will *draw all men* unto me." It is by virtue of his having been lifted up as the propitiation, the sin-offering, "for the *sins of the whole world*," that our glorified Lord will eventually be privileged to be the Judge of the world and to grant forgiveness and reconciliation and restitution to all who will heartily obey him; while "whosoever will not obey that Prophet will be cut off from amongst the people," – in the second death. – Acts 3:23.

As the drawing now, by the Father, is not a compulsion, but merely a constraining by the truth, through a knowledge of it, so the drawing of the Millennial age upon the world of mankind will not be a compulsion, but merely the influence of righteousness and truth constraining toward love for righteousness and thus to the reward of righteousness – eternal life.

The Apostle seems to intimate in our lesson that quite a good number may claim an intimate knowledge of God falsely, and hence with great plainness of speech he informs us that, "He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." It is thus very evident that the Apostle does not mean merely a knowledge *about* God but an intimate knowledge of God; implying fellowship and communion with him: he then gives us a test by which we may judge accordingly whether or not we are new creatures in the Lord and have the love of God developed in us to any extent. The test is *obedience*. In proportion as we keep the Lord's Word, in like proportion the love of God is perfected in us; for if we have received the mind of Christ, the holy spirit, the spirit of God, the effect will be to cause us to both will and do his good pleasure – to the extent of our ability. And this ability should be continually on the increase year by year. And altho we may not hope to be perfected until we shall be

"changed" and be granted our new resurrection bodies, nevertheless all the while we may keep so closely in touch with the Lord in the spirit of our minds that we may have continual fellowship with him: and by confessing our faults and seeking his forgiveness we may continue to the end of our journey clean from sin, even tho we must still acknowledge the imperfections of the flesh, – that in our flesh dwelleth no perfection.

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