

## CONFESSION OF SIN ESSENTIAL TO FORGIVENESS

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.

THE Apostle John is not here addressing the world of 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 important particulars.

First. 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 Grace Covenant – the Covenant of Sacrifice. (Psalm 50:5.) On the contrary, all should be informed of the fact that repentance and a 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, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

Second. 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 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 connection with our text.

## **BASIS OF TRUE FELLOWSHIP**

The Apostle John in writing this Epistle clearly states his object, 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 experience the *fulness* of joy, peace and blessing that they might possess. Too many are content with simply diluted first principles of the doctrine of Christ. Therefore, as the Apostle Paul declares, such are merely "babes in Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:1,2; Hebrews 5:12-14.) Of course, they have a blessing 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 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 to which we may aspire must be along the lines of goodness, purity, and 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 enjoyed by those who "walk in the light."

Moreover, to the extent that we walk in the light and in harmony and fellowship with God, we shall 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, it 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 every one 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. Again He says, "Who are My brethren?... Verily, I say unto you, He that doeth the will of My Father, the same is My brother." – Matthew 7:21; 12:48-50.

We are not, therefore, to anticipate "fellowship" with all who name the name of Christ as 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* [R5938 : page 244] and union. That bond is the one faith and one baptism into the one Lord.

## SHORTCOMINGS AND FAULTS ARE SINS

But while this fellowship between us and our 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 imperfections of sin. Although under our Grace 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 shortcomings and faults. These may properly be termed *sins*, as in our text; for "sin is a transgression of the Law," however *unintentional* it may be.

But the Divine arrangement under the Grace Covenant, on behalf of the Lord's people, is that these unintentional faults and shortcomings need not be charged up against us as sins; but may instead 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 we continually make application for forgiveness, because of realization of imperfections of our flesh.

### **AN INSIDIOUS SNARE OF THE ADVERSARY**

Further on in this Epistle, the Apostle uses the word "sin" in a different sense from the above, saying, "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: "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that Wicked One toucheth him not." – 1 John 3:6-9; 5:18.

In these passages the Apostle uses the word "sin" in its full or absolute sense, meaning *wilful* sin, deliberate sin, intentional sin – not merely shortcomings 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.

## INJUSTICE TO THE BRETHREN INEXCUSABLE

At first thought, many may be inclined to say, "Well, I am in no danger of that sin; for I am sure that I would not commit sin wilfully, intentionally, designedly." But let us notice, dear friends, that there is a way in which sin may come upon us without being at the time a wilful sin, but which later might become wilful sin. For instance, any transgression committed, either in total ignorance or with only a partial acquiescence of our wills, might become a full, wilful, deliberate sin *afterward*, if we should come to a clear knowledge of the truth respecting the subject, and fail to repent of it to the Lord and to undo so far as is in our power the wrong toward our fellow-creatures. To consent to a sin clearly and fully understood simply because at the time of its committal we were in ignorance, and to refuse to make amends for it, and thus endorse the sin intelligently, would appear to make of it a *will-ful* sin.

With this view of the matter, the children of God cannot afford to sanction in their own minds even the slightest injustice or untruth toward each other, or toward *any*. The essence of this thought is found in our Lord's command: "If thou comest to the altar [if we have anything to offer to the Lord, either of service or of worship **[R5939 : page 244]** or of thanks], and there rememberest that thy brother hath **[R5939 : page 244]** aught against thee [that some one has been wronged by you, either in word or thought or act] leave there thy gift before the altar [do not think that it will be acceptable to God while in your heart or outwardly you are practising injustice toward others]; first go and be reconciled to thy brother [make amends to him, apologies, explanations in full, of whatever injury you have done him], and then come and offer thy gift [assured that in such an attitude of heart the Lord Almighty will be pleased to accept your gift]." – Matthew 5:23,24.

In describing those who sin wilfully, the Apostle Paul uses very strong, figurative language, declaring that inasmuch as they are in

heart-sympathy with sin, and not in opposition to it, they are the opponents of the Son of God, who was so out of sympathy with sin in its every form that He laid down His life to redeem us from its power and curse. The Apostle declares that such wilful sinners may be esteemed as the enemies of Christ, who really trample Him and His goodness and love under their feet, figuratively, disdain His mercy and favor as well as His instruction in righteousness. He says that inasmuch as they were once sanctified, as a result of their faith in the precious blood and its cleansing from sin, their turning now into harmony with sin would imply that they now disesteem the atoning blood, counting it not a sacred thing, but common – these do despite to the spirit of Divine favor which had held out to them freedom from the yoke of sin and ultimate release from its penalty, death, and the attainment, as the Lord's people, of the crown of life eternal. – Hebrews 10:26-29.

### **CONFESSION OF SIN PRECEDES FORGIVENESS**

But let us return to the consideration of the other use of the word "sin" as found in our context, and apply the terms to the faults and imperfections which God's people are zealously striving against, 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 them and bought them 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 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 deal of 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, revealed in His Word as meat in due season for the Household of Faith.

Thus we see that there is but 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 will leave them to the darkness of their own way. Can we wonder, then, that so many are in darkness **[R5939 : page 245]** 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 and approval?

These things are written not to cultivate in us the thought that we may sin with impunity, may 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 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 to fight a good fight against sin.

### **OUR TEXT APPLIES TO THE CHURCH**

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 Covenant of Grace. 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 providing a propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins. This is the reason why we may come "with boldness [confidence] to the Throne of Grace," not only realizing that God is for us, and that the Lord Jesus sympathizes with us, and is our Advocate, but also and especially realizing the merit of the sacrifice which He has already deposited with Justice, and which He fully imputed on behalf of all who love and obey Him, upon their acceptance of the Father's terms.

But, says the Apostle, "He is the propitiation not only 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. The world has not been called and drawn to holiness and truth. During the present Age "no man can come unto Christ except the Father *draw him.*" At present the drawing influence of the Truth is extended only to "*him that hath an ear to hear.*" The great mass of mankind have never in any sense of the word heard 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 is "*for* the sins of the whole world," just so surely shall every member of the race 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; 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 the 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, reconciliation and restitution to all who will heartily obey Him; while "whosoever will not obey that Prophet will be cut off from among the people" – in the Second Death. – Acts 3:23.

### **THE TEST OF OBEDIENCE**

As the drawing now done 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 the Epistle from which our text is taken that quite a good number may claim an intimate knowledge of God falsely. 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 will and do His good pleasure – to the extent of ability.

This ability should be continually on the increase year by year. And although we may not hope to be perfected until we shall be "changed" and granted our new resurrection bodies, nevertheless, all the while we may keep so close to 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 though we must still acknowledge the imperfections of the flesh – that in our flesh dwelleth no perfection.

