

FORGIVENESS

BY CONFESSION ALONE



MOSES C. ONWUBIKO

**A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MAN'S FALL FROM GRACE
HIS REDEMPTION AND
THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

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Grace, His Redemption, and the
Empowerment of the Holy Spirit

Moses C. Onwubiko



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“Buy truth, and do not sell it” (Prov. 23:23).

Are you aware that sound Bible teaching is a precious and priceless piece of spiritual jewelry? Indeed, church history has shown how difficult sound teaching is to come by, especially in modern-day Christianity! So when God from His oasis of grace leads us to the pearls of truth in His infallible and inerrant Word, we ought to cherish them without reserve. The Bible is the treasure box that holds your capacity to enjoy abundant life, to reap maximum happiness in life, friendship, marriage, and business, and to enjoy unprecedented blessings for today and tomorrow.

Therefore, “Buy truth” (Prov. 23:23)—stay grounded in the Word.

For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her.

(Prov. 8:11)

For you are not under law but under grace.

(Rom. 6:14)

CONTENTS

The Good News.....ix

An Important Message for the Believer.....xi

Dedication xiii

Acknowledgments xv

Introductionxvii

Section I

Chapter 1 — The Holiness of God.....3

Chapter 2 — A Panoramic View of Fellowship.....13

Chapter 3 — Man’s Broken Fellowship with God.....25

Chapter 4 — God’s Grace in Restoring Relationship37

Chapter 5 — An Overview of Animal Sacrifice.....45

Chapter 6 — The Horror of the Cross.....61

Chapter 7 — Sin and the Justice of God.....73

Section II

Chapter 8 — Overview of Carnality.....89

Chapter 9 — Salvation by Grace.....101

Chapter 10 — Grace: The Foundation for Restoring Fellowship..... 107

Chapter 11 — Overview of Confession.....	115
Chapter 12 — What about Repentance?.....	133
Chapter 13 — The Consequences of Unforgiveness.....	143
Chapter 14 — The Importance of Staying in Fellowship	151
Chapter 15 — Final Thoughts.....	157
Endnotes.....	161

THE GOOD NEWS

The information in this book is tailored for those who have personally trusted in the Person and the work of Jesus Christ. We are all sinners, but not because of our personal sins. We are sinners because Adam, our biological father, sinned. “In Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22). “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). We stand condemned, separated from a holy God. There is nothing anyone can do. Good deeds cannot bring us to God. This is not good news.

Thank God it does not end there! Here is the good news: two thousand years ago, the Creator-God took on human form and came to earth as a man. Jesus Christ is unique in that He was, and still is, the only person on record born of a virgin, thereby without Adam’s sin. This set Him apart from sinners (Rom. 3:23). Because He was born with a sinless nature, He was qualified as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. The Word of God tells us,

Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,

“Sacrifice and offering You have not desired,

But a body You have prepared for Me;

In whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You
have taken no pleasure.

“Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come

(In the scroll of the book it is written of Me)

To do Your will, O God.” (Heb. 10:5–7)

What is God’s will? His will is that His Son might be given as a sin

offering for us all. The Bible tells us, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). God literally judged Jesus on the cross for your sins and mine. Therein is the epitome of God’s love: Jesus paying the full price for our sins.

The news gets better. According to Scripture, “Christ died for our sins ... He was buried ... He was raised on the third day, and He appeared to ... the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time” (1 Cor. 15:3–6). The best part of the good news is this: Jesus Christ is alive. He rose from the dead!

What then must you do to be saved? The answer is simple. Wholeheartedly, by faith alone, accept the biblical evidence about Jesus Christ to be absolute truth. “But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1).

Right now, you can pause, mull over the evidence, and then personally trust in Christ alone for your eternal salvation. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR THE BELIEVER

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

The moment we trust in Christ alone, God makes us “new creatures” (2 Cor. 5:17) “once and for all” (Heb. 10:10). What is more, He gives us His Holy Spirit to permanently indwell us (Rom. 5:5). Being in fellowship, His Spirit empowers us (Acts 1:8) to do good works. This is God’s method! The only method! There is no other!

It boils down to this: any work done outside the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is tagged “wood, hay, and straw” (1 Cor. 3:12).

Sin, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, breaks our fellowship with God. This broken fellowship robs us, not only of the mentorship, but also “the fruit of the Holy Spirit ... love, peace, joy ...” (Gal. 5:22), those spiritual assets tailored for good works.

The good news is that God in His infinite grace has provided a solution for restoration to fellowship: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). In light of this, you may want to pause and acknowledge any recent sin in your life, even the sins of worry and anxiety.



Father-God, we come before You with humble hearts. We are acutely aware that Your Holy Spirit is the Supreme Author of Scripture. So

we pray that He might open our eyes to Your inerrant and infallible truth. May He open our eyes and guide us each step of the way to uncover and appreciate the treasure of truth held in Scripture. Please teach us Your biblical truth regarding restoration to fellowship and its implications. Help us to learn the key to maintaining fellowship with You. This we ask in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

DEDICATION

To Richard Hays and Debby Hagar: a husband and wife, highly dedicated and passionate for the work of our Father's Kingdom - the "Priscilla and Aquila" (Acts 18:26) of modern day Christianity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My overflowing gratefulness goes to my close friend and partner in God's vineyard, Pastor Bruce Bumgardner, a rare servant of God, for his important contribution. His insight and suggestions helped sharpen the focus and perspective of this work.

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In all, I place the garlands of my gratitude on the Lamb of God, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose ultimate sacrifice on the cross of Calvary paved the way for my work, and on the Holy Spirit for the unsearchable riches of His mentorship.

INTRODUCTION

Make no mistake, the study at hand is timely in this critical age when millions of believers are living without the influential power of God's Holy Spirit. Many are living unaware, mired in prolonged carnality, manifesting every facet of evil. They do not know what it means to be in fellowship, let alone understand how to achieve it. They function daily without any fellowship with the Father and the Spirit, and therefore are powerless to manifest the life of Christ. Thus the church is no longer attractive to the lost.

This book will take an authentic Christian, one who has professed faith in Christ alone, on a journey that will impact his life for the praise of God's glory. Grace will lead the way in our study. Many have a fuzzy concept of grace, but it is simple. Grace is unearned and unmerited favor. Grace is God's policy. It defines how God deals with His creatures, ranging from the creation of man, through his fall, to the restoration of man, and on to his upkeep. Grace engulfs God's work!

Billions of years ago, in eternity past, God in His infinite grace and wisdom made a sovereign decision to create man. In time, God created man and brought man into a relationship with Himself. Man never participated in his own creation. In a state of innocence and perfection, man had undisturbed, harmonious fellowship with God.

One day something went terribly wrong. Man violated God's only prohibition. Man ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:16). Consequently, his relationship with God was lost, and his intimate, day-to-day fellowship with Him was broken. God was deeply grieved (Gen. 6:6).

Man's failure prompted God to take action. He condemned man and at the same time gave him the promise of a Messiah, who would come to restore man's broken relationship and fellowship. Jesus Christ was that Messiah. He would come through a virgin birth and therefore would be the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sin of man (Gen. 3:15).

Man's utter trust that the sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross is sufficient for the full payment for man's sins cancels the eternal consequence of sin against him (Heb. 10:10). It was true for Adam and all who looked forward to the Messiah, as well as all of us who look back to the Messiah and His death on the cross. This is the plan of God. This is the very essence of good news.

God, in His grace, judicially imputes His very righteousness (Rom. 3:22) and His very life, eternal life, to anyone who accepts Christ's sacrifice (John 3:36). This action results in new birth, or regeneration, and establishes a permanent relationship with God. An old saying is "Once a son, always a son." How true: a "son does remain forever" (John 8:35).

Everyone has a relationship with God. The unbeliever has a relationship of wrath, and the believer has a relationship of blessing. Keep in mind that while the believer's relationship with God is irrevocable, based on God's perfect work (Eccl. 3:14), his fellowship is temporary. In other words, the believer's eternal relationship with God, once established, cannot be lost. But fellowship can be temporarily lost or broken whenever the believer sins.

The believer's eternal relationship with God, once established, cannot be lost. Fellowship can be temporarily lost or broken whenever the believer sins.

That may sound a little awkward. If relationship with God cannot be

lost, why did Adam lose his relationship with God when he sinned? The answer is not hard to understand. Adam was perfect when he was created (Gen. 1:31). Adam did not receive God's imputed righteousness and His eternal life until after Adam's fall and new birth. Eternal life is by definition everlasting life.

Though Adam lost his relationship with God, our relationship with Him, once established, is permanent. However, we can break fellowship. Confession of one's sins is the only God-ordained grace method whereby a broken fellowship with Him can be restored. Confession is one of the major themes of Scripture and one of the most distorted. Clearly, Satan is behind this distortion.

Satan knows that once a believer masters and consistently applies the basic principle of confession, the believer enjoys a wonderful fellowship with God, fulfilling His plan for the believer's life. In fellowship, we have available to us the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit to defeat Satan and his minions on every front in the spiritual battleground. Because of this, Satan fights relentlessly to keep us locked up in prolonged carnality without God's light illuminating our path. That is tragic.

Today, a great number of God's children are confused, not knowing how their fellowship with God can be restored. Some teach that confession to God must be channeled through human agents (priests). Some teach that it should be made directly to God through the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. The former teach that penance or remorse must accompany confession for it to be effective. The latter sharply disagree, maintaining that confession is simply acknowledging one's sins before a holy God, rejecting outright the idea that remorse or any kind of penance is a prerequisite to confession and forgiveness. They ask, "Where is grace if agonizing and showing remorse are requirements for forgiveness of sins?" Adding to the discussion, a new group has emerged, teaching that believers no longer need to confess their sins. What a web of confusion.

Be that as it may, confession of sins applies to God's children. Unsaved individuals do not confess their sins to be saved. They simply trust in the work of Jesus Christ, the One who paid the penalty for their sins.

We mention this because many, in evangelistic campaigns, ask unbelievers to confess their sins for salvation. They often quote 1 John 1:9 to support their action: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Using this as a salvation verse is an improper application of Scripture. That passage is strictly for believers, and we will study it in depth. God has established a grace means whereby the believer can be restored when fellowship is broken.

In the Old Testament, the principle of confession was taught through animal sacrifices. Back in the garden, when Adam and Eve placed their faith in the coming Savior, God's promised seed (Gen. 3:15), God sacrificed an animal (Gen. 3:21). This was a type, or foreshadowing, of the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:29).

Job, in the Old Testament, was familiar with the concept of animal sacrifice for sins. He offered animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins for his entire household. He "would arise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually" (Job 1:5). Restoration to fellowship is a continual process because we continue to sin. This explains why Job offered burnt offerings on a regular basis.

Moses dedicated a large portion of the book of Leviticus to drive this truth home. Levitical offerings teach us many lessons about confession. In Levitical offerings, priests used animal sacrifices as a teaching aid, pointing to the sacrificial Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Once Jesus Christ was sacrificed, all other sacrifices relating to sin were abolished. The specialized priesthood was also made null and void, a subject we shall examine in detail later.

Confession, the main focus of our study, is woven together with other important biblical subjects like a tapestry. There are thirteen major topics and several subtopics that are critical to understanding our subject.

We build the foundation of our tapestry with the fibers of God's holiness, the panoramic view of fellowship, man's broken fellowship with God, God's grace in the restoration of man, animal sacrifice, the horror of the cross, sin, and God's justice. Into these we shall weave the threads of the consequence of a prolonged carnality, grace in restoration to fellowship, confession, consequences of unforgiveness, repentance, and the importance of staying in fellowship.

**We do not do any work for salvation. We do not do
any work for our restoration to fellowship.**

Before we begin, we need to sear our souls with the hot iron of the principle of grace. Hear me loud and clear: there's *absolutely nothing* a sinful person can do to impress a holy God. There's *no amount of work* a person can muster to solve his sin problem. That is a fact of Scripture! God *does not* need nor accept our assistance in resolving the problem of our sinful condition. We do not do any work in salvation. We do not do any work in our restoration to fellowship.

God does all the work! Therein is *grace*, the overarching theme of God's work. If we lean on grace, we will never go wrong.

Now we are ready to examine our first topic, the holiness of God.



God of ages, we pause before You with humble hearts. We petition for the illuminating ministry of Your Holy Spirit. Please open the gateway of our understanding to Your truth. This and more, we request in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Unless a Christian really knows how to have fellowship with God, he or she will be an easy target for Satan's efforts to undermine believers' harmony with the Father and the Son.

—Zane Hodges



SECTION I

Man was created to have fellowship with God.
Adam's disobedience broke both relationship and fellowship.
God, in grace, provided redemption and restoration.
Relationship precedes fellowship.

CHAPTER 1

The Holiness of God

A proper view of the holiness of God should make the believer sensitive to his own sin. —Charles C. Ryrie

Foundational studies that lead to our main subject of confession and fellowship are a must. These concepts are anchored in events that took place long ago. Holy God always existed, and He brought creatures—angels and man—into being. Their betrayal and God’s resultant promise must be fully understood to comprehend the amazing blessings of confession and fellowship.

Our study begins with these four topics:

1. A brief overview of God
2. God’s holiness defined
3. A brief overview of God’s holiness
4. God’s intolerance of unholiness



A Brief Overview of God

We cannot overstress the importance of knowing God as He has revealed Himself to us. Unless we know God, we cannot properly

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

relate to Him, let alone love Him. Impossible! Moses and the apostle Paul were just two of those who knew this fundamental truth. We can see their appetite to know God. Moses yearned, “I pray Thee, show me Thy glory” (Ex. 33:18 RSV). The apostle desired “that I may know Him” (Phil. 3:10). Our knowledge of God, both academically and experientially, is directly related to our understanding of our unworthiness compared to His perfect holiness.

That’s not all. It influences how we relate to Him.

**We cannot overstress the importance of knowing
God as He has revealed Himself to us.**

Libraries are stuffed full of books and commentaries, written, and often revised, in an attempt to answer the question, “Who is God?” Admittedly, no volume of work can fully explain God. The study of God is inexhaustible. Many definitions have been offered. One is from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. God is “Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth” (Question 4).¹ Like others, it’s an honest attempt to concisely define God. In doing so, the *Westminster* defined Him in terms of His revealed attributes. But there is much more about God that is way beyond our comprehension.

We offer this definition: God is an infinite, unsearchable, incomprehensible, indescribable being who manifests Himself in three distinct personalities and functions. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Trinity or the Godhead) are co-equal and co-eternal, with shared attributes of eternal life, righteousness, justice, love, immutability, veracity, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

Though this definition is a mouthful, we concede that God, an infinite Being, is undefinable. The idea that God is the Self-Existent One,

and that He has always existed “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2) is something a finite mind cannot fully grasp. Perhaps the best definition is the one God Himself gave to Moses, “I am.”

Using God’s revealed attributes is the best way to describe God. Such descriptions can be found in the books *Biblical Doctrine of Salvation* and *Disaster: God’s Warning Bell*. Please master the understanding of these attributes. This will increase your knowledge of who and what God is, greatly benefitting your spiritual life.

For example, when we firmly comprehend that God is *omniscient* (all-knowing), that He knows us inside out, such knowledge will inevitably improve our perception of our great God. David had a great understanding in his soul as evidenced by his words, “O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou dost beset me behind and before, and layest thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is higher, I cannot attain it” (Ps. 139:1–6 NRSV).

Understanding God’s omniscience helps the believer live with confidence. He believes that God knows what He is doing for and through the believer. His soul is calmed by the knowledge that God knows every possibility and provides for His children.

When we know that God is *omnipotent* (all-powerful), that knowledge boosts our confidence in Him and reassures us that God is in control; our circumstances are not. The psalmist sang, “So great is thy power” (Ps. 66:3 NRSV). Job knew this even in his darkest moment. He concluded, “I know that thou canst do all things and no purpose of thine can be thwarted” (Job 42:2 NRSV).

Repeat: “No purpose of thine can be thwarted.” God said to Jeremiah, “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

for me?” (Jer. 32:27). Our Lord Jesus Christ told us, “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). A believer who has a grasp of the truth and applies it enjoys God’s peace no matter how intense the suffering.

Consider the reaction of three young believers in Daniel’s day. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were threatened with a death sentence in the fiery furnace for their refusal to worship an idol. Their reply was sobering: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up” (Dan. 3:17–18 NRSV). They were not afraid. They had confidence since they understood the biblical concept of omnipotence. God holds our future.

It can’t be said enough: knowledge of God is everything. Daniel agrees: “The people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits” (Dan. 11:32 NKJV). The key to staying calm in a dilemma is knowing who and what God is. Reaching for the panic button when calamity strikes is a sign that one has not yet mastered the subject of God’s sovereignty. The disciples’ reaction when they faced a life-threatening storm on the Sea of Galilee is a perfect illustration. The thought of drowning consumed them even with Jesus right there beside them in the boat. They panicked. “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38).

They didn’t grasp what it meant that Jesus, who was the Creator-God, the Savior, was with them. They didn’t comprehend *sovereignty* (supreme power and authority). It never occurred to them that God can never sink; therefore neither could they since they were under His protective care. When a believer masters the concept that God rules supremely, he abandons the notion that anyone or any circumstance can derail God’s plan and purpose. David said it well: “The LORD has

established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all” (Ps. 103:19).

Isaiah says, “I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure ... Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it’” (Isa. 46:9–11).

In the same way, knowledge that God is *immutable* (unchanging) should calm our fear regarding any future policy change within the Godhead. “For the LORD does not change” (Mal. 3:6). This implies that all His promises are unchangeable. His Being is unchangeable. His plans for you and me cannot be changed by changing circumstances. This is good news!

Assuming that we know all these wonderful, reassuring truths, the real question is how can we enjoy fellowship with God so His superabundant blessing can flow to us without measure? The answer is simple: we must adjust to His holiness in two ways, presalvation and postsalvation. We will come to these two elements later in our study. First, let us take a moment and consider God’s holiness.

God’s Holiness Defined

Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Ex. 15:11 NRSV).

God is holy. Scripture leaves no room for debate, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:3). Man defines holiness by his own set of standards or in comparison to other people. Man gloats and looks down on others when he believes he has scored a higher point on the scale of moral conduct, or when he believes that he is better than this or that person.

No one can measure up to God's holiness.

For centuries the challenge for scholars, theologians, Bible teachers, and laymen is how to succinctly define God's holiness. God's holiness is absolute. There is no one before or after Him by which to measure Him. He has set the bar of holiness, comprised of His Righteousness and Justice, higher than the heavens. No one can measure up to God's holiness.

Consequently, "God's perfection is the standard for our moral character and the motivation for religious practice."² The apostle Paul referred to this when he declared, "For all have sinned and fall short of the holiness of God" (Rom. 3:23).³ "Holiness in the Bible means separation from all that is common or unclean. In respect to God, holiness means not only that He is separate from all that is unclean and evil but also that He is positively pure and thus distinct from all others."⁴ God's holiness is defined as a state of incorruption, absence of evil, and immutable purity. The Bible tells us God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:9). This brings us to our next topic.

A Brief Overview of God's Holiness

God cannot be anything but pure. "He is untouched and unstained by the evil in the world."⁵ He has neither taken part in any evil activity, nor has He tempted anyone to do so. "God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13 NRSV). Habakkuk states, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab. 1:13). "Proper reaction to God's holiness, His separateness, is one of awe, reverence, and silence. 'Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy' (Ps. 99:3)."⁶

The truth is in; the chasm between man's attempted holiness and God's perfect holiness is too vast to measure. Where does this leave us? Alone! It leaves the unbeliever outside of relationship with God and the believer outside of fellowship with God.

The knowledge that our nature is corrupted, sinful, and soiled in every sense of the word ought to stimulate a sense of awe and reverence when we are in God's presence. Our pride should give way to humility. The notion that we are better than someone else should give way to the realization that we are *all* unworthy before Holy God.

This was true of the prophet Isaiah when he was in God's presence. He instantly became aware of his own uncleanness and impurity. "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:5 NRSV).

Peter, the fisherman, had a similar experience when he realized that the One talking with him was no ordinary man but God Himself. Realizing this, he exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8 NRSV).

Like Isaiah and Peter, "woe is me" ought to be our reaction when we are in His presence, and we are in His presence twenty-four/seven. God in His matchless grace has made us His temple: "for we are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16). So wherever we are, we are in His presence. David asks, "where shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139:7).

We come before God in a special way when we approach the throne room of heaven in prayer (Heb. 4:16). There, we ought to view ourselves as undeserving children of God who stand before Him only because of what Christ has done for us on the cross. We forfeit our fellowship with God any time we become arrogant, thinking we are pure in God's sight, even after our confession. The truth is that

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

a believer with a glimpse of God's holiness *always* views himself as inadequate before Him.

Sadly, we have lost touch with the holiness of God.

Today many have lost any concept of a holy God, preferring to think of God as their buddy. Some even call Him “dude” or “the man upstairs.” There are T-shirts stating, “Jesus is my homeboy.” Sadly, we have lost touch with the holiness of God. I pray that this study will awaken us to who and what God is and our relationship to Him.

God's Intolerance of Unholiness

David sang, “For thou art not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not sojourn with thee ... Thou destroyest those who speak lies” (Ps. 5:4, 6 RSV). Make no mistake; God takes His holiness seriously.

How seriously?

- So seriously that God commanded Moses in the burning bush, “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is a holy ground” (Ex. 3:5 NRSV).
- So seriously “that the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the holy place ... lest he die’” (Lev. 16:2 RSV).
- So seriously that God killed Aaron's two sons on the spot when they offered “unholy fire before the LORD” (Lev. 10:1).
- So seriously that God smote Uzzah in a flash when he touched the ark of God, a holy vessel, “and he died there beside the ark of God” (2 Sam. 6:7).

The list of God's actions regarding those who took His holiness for

granted can go on. But some did not take God's holiness lightly. Isaiah was one of them.

Isaiah's Confession

We noted that Isaiah came close to death when he was ushered into God's presence. Instant confession of his sin saved his life. Observe the beauty of the unsearchable grace of God. Isaiah simply confessed or acknowledged his impurity before Holy God. There's not an iota of work on his part.

"Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven'" (Isa. 6:6–7).

Also observe that God did all the work in Isaiah's restoration to fellowship.

- ✦ Isaiah did not fly to God; God sent His angel to him.
- ✦ Isaiah did not bring a coal from God's altar; the angel did.
- ✦ Isaiah did not touch his mouth with the burning coal; the angel did that for him.

The angel's action resulted in two things. First, Isaiah was forgiven and restored. Second, now being in good standing, God commissioned him (Isa. 6:8–9).

Isaiah did *nothing* to rid himself of his sinful condition. God did everything necessary to restore Isaiah. When it comes to confession and forgiveness, human work is not the solution; the bright, bold sign of grace stands tall for everyone to behold.

God cannot tolerate any unholiness. God does not, will not, cannot condone or take part in any activity that is impure. Holiness demands holiness: "be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). This means that one's

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

relationship and continued fellowship with God demands holiness. But man cannot measure up to God's standard of perfect holiness. Therefore God's grace policy demands that He make holy anyone with a willing heart who recognizes his sinful condition and accepts God's grace provision. God makes holy or purifies the unbeliever so he can enter relationship with God. He purifies the believer so he can enjoy fellowship with God.

The main focus of our study is fellowship with God: how to have it, maintain it, and regain it when lost. Relationship is the prerequisite for fellowship, and how God accomplishes both will be covered. As we progress, it is most important to distinguish between relationship and fellowship.

Relationship with God: once established, is permanent and cannot be revoked.

Fellowship with God: is temporary and can be lost—but God has made provision for restoration.

First, we will examine fellowship. This is where the believer benefits from the peace, power, and maximum blessing of God.

CHAPTER 2

A Panoramic View of Fellowship

Fellowship with God is to live a life of holiness in his sacred presence. —Simon J. Kistemaker

God is the pioneer of fellowship, one of the pivotal subjects of Scripture. For the Godhead, fellowship is a means whereby their divine essence is shared. For Christians, fellowship with God grounds their spiritual life. Through it, they tap into God's power. Without it, they kiss God's power and the spiritual life good-bye. Beware: Satan knows about the power of fellowship and tries to cloud the issue. He knows that the fulfillment of God's plan depends solely on one's fellowship with God.

What constitutes fellowship? What does Scripture mean when it says, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24)? How can one live a victorious Christian life?

Sadly, a great number of believers today do not understand the significance of being in fellowship with God nor how to accomplish it. Many are spiritually bankrupt. Their lifestyles do not reflect their new natures (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24). If Christians would learn how to stay in fellowship with God and allow the Holy Spirit to operate in their lives, Christianity would be more appealing to the unbelieving world.

**Fellowship with God is the powerhouse of the
spiritual life.**

Satan has figured out that the way to rob believers of God's power is to rob them of their fellowship with God. This explains why he works relentlessly to keep believers locked in the dark, ignorant of God's Word, and works tirelessly to keep Christians from staying in fellowship with God. Satan knows that God is holy, that sin, no matter how minute, ruptures our fellowship with Him. Therefore Satan attacks us in our minds (through our thoughts), our deeds (through our actions), and our tongues (through our words). Knowing that confession is God's only recovery procedure, he attacks the truth regarding it. We must be mindful of his schemes.

Let there be no misunderstanding: fellowship with God is the powerhouse of the spiritual life.

As we progress, we will weave past studies with the new, so we need to keep previous lessons foremost in our minds. Therefore we will review prior sections before beginning the next chapter.

Review:

In chapter 1, we answered the question, "Who is God?" We noted that God is an infinite Being, who, in eternity past, manifested Himself in three distinct personalities and functions, co-equal in power, co-equal in essence, and co-equal in authority. We defined and visited God's holiness. We examined His intolerance of unholiness and how His justice adjusts to those who take His holiness for granted.



In this chapter we consider six topics:

1. What is fellowship?
2. Categories of fellowship
3. Ultimate fellowship
4. God's decision to share fellowship with man
5. Man's fellowship with God
6. The conduit of fellowship between God and man

What Is Fellowship?

There are several Greek words for "fellowship." *Koinonia* is one of them. It means fellowship, communion, participation, share a common life, and partnership.⁷ *Koinonia* in the basic sense means sharing⁸

The Christian fellowship is all this and more. It is the combining of "the divine with the human, that constitutes ... unparalleled life."⁹

The root idea is sharing something in common. James Orr comments, "Christ is ... the center of ... unity and the origin of every expression of fellowship."¹⁰ How true! He adds, "Sometimes the fellowship is essentially an experience and as such it is scarcely susceptible of definition ... In other instances the fellowship approaches or includes the idea of [social] intercourse,"¹¹ understanding social intercourse as the "exchange of products, ideas etc."¹²

This shows us two branches of fellowship. Let us take a closer look at each.

- 1. Fellowship with God.** Fellowship as an experience cannot be defined.

For example, fellowship as it pertains to sharing in Christ's suffering, cannot properly be defined because the degree of

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

suffering experienced varies from person to person. “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10 KJV).

2. Fellowship with other Christians. Fellowship that involves the idea of exchange or sharing of products or ideas can be defined.

For Example, fellowship that includes sharing what we have with others is commanded and can be described.

Share what you have with the holy people who need it. Eagerly welcome strangers as guests. (Rom. 12:13 BECK)

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Heb. 13:16 NRSV)

From everyone who has been given much, much will be required. (Luke 12:48)

As for the rich in this world, charge them ... to do good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future. (1 Tim. 6:17–19)

The key to all fellowship is fellowship with God.

Awesome! Believers relate to one another in fellowship by sharing material things and encouraging one another with unceasing love. This shows unity among brothers and sisters in Christ. They take their lead from the unity that exists among the Triune Godhead.

The key to all fellowship is our fellowship with God. We cannot have meaningful fellowship with other people, our spouses, our friends, or believers in general without first having fellowship with God. Simon

Kistemaker states, "Fellowship means intimately sharing in the full light of God's presence."¹³

Categories of Fellowship

Fellowship among the Godhead

Imagine all the way back from eternity past, even billions of years ago, the Trinity existed as a model for fellowship. This is the ultimate and unadulterated fellowship within the members of the Godhead. They share attributes, authority, and power in equal proportions. For instance, God the Father shares His attributes with God the Son, "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him" (Col. 1:19). All members share perfect love, joy, and peace in equal measure. They have perfect union, perfect unity, perfect communion, and perfect communication.

Regarding communication, the Lord affirmed, "As I hear, I judge" (John 5:30). Regarding unity, He prayed, "I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity" (John 17:23). Regarding love, He said, "That the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me ... for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:23–24).

In the same way, the Holy Spirit shares His joy, peace, and love in equal proportion with both the Father and the Son, and They with Him. What is more astounding is God's decision to share His fellowship with man.

Fellowship between a Believer and God

This is unique. The ultimate experience! God in His infinite grace extends His fellowship to believers on a conditional basis. "God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Two things are required for worship: the filling of the

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Holy Spirit and biblical truth. By means of the filling of the Holy Spirit, believers enter into fellowship with the Godhead, where they share God's power and the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). By being in fellowship with God, believers tap into divine assets designed for living the Christian life. Without the assets outlined in Galatians 5:22–23, it is *impossible* for any believer in Christ to live the spiritual life, *period*. This explains the apostle John's yearning "that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3 NRSV).

When a believer is in fellowship with God, he experiences the energizing power of God the Holy Spirit, which prompts sharing in all levels of Christian living. While a believer in fellowship cannot transfer his joy to others, he can allow someone else to have a taste of Christ's love by demonstrating kindness to them. This is the result of fellowship with God.

We derive spiritual power by intimately sharing in God's holiness. "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). But how can a man mired in sin be as holy as God? Fellowship with God is the only path to holiness in the spiritual life. This cannot be emphasized enough.

Fellowship among Believers

When believers have a close relationship with each other, they are said to be having fellowship. This closeness consists of "common doctrinal allegiance ... willingness to share material things, the experience of communion in the Lord's Supper and in sharing prayers."¹⁴ That was the trademark of the early church. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and prayer" (Acts 2:42). Simply, "all the aspects of worship constitutes fellowship."¹⁵

Fellowship among Demons

Satan is the prime distorter of fellowship. He is the counterfeiter of God's perfect fellowship. Satan and his spirit beings (demons) interact with each other in ways we cannot fully comprehend. They share power, animosity, jealousy, envy, intense anger, frustration, restlessness, and hatred. They also share ideas and intelligence on how to attack God's plan and ambush us as believers in Christ.

Fellowship among Believers and Demons

Once out of fellowship with God, a believer opens the door for fellowship with demons. The apostle Paul was concerned about this when he wrote to the Corinthian church, "I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils" (1 Cor. 10:20 KJV). You may recoil at the idea of having fellowship with demons. Yet it is as simple as demons supplying you with the world's thoughts to replace God's thoughts. A believer can fellowship with demons through the thinking of the world.

Fellowship among Unbelievers

Unbelievers, though they do not have a relationship with God, can and do have fellowship among themselves. Their fellowship cannot be grounded in God's fellowship. They share love, joy, and happiness, but it is not the happiness of God.

Ultimate Fellowship

Recall the Greek word *koinonia*, which means fellowship. An ultimate fellowship is the supreme, intimate, mutual partnership and communion in equal proportions among the members of the Godhead. Each member of the Godhead shares unconditional love, peace, and joy with the others. We employ the phrase *ultimate*

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

fellowship to describe God's fellowship because it is the highest and purest form. It is the only fellowship acceptable to Holy God.

**Christians draw their life from the life of Christ.
Broken fellowship with God halts all aspects of
Christian living.**

Ultimate Fellowship in Relation to Believers

Just as human life keeps blood flowing to the body's organs so they can function, ultimate fellowship pumps spiritual blood to every part of Christian living. Christians draw their life from the life of Christ. Broken fellowship with God halts all aspects of Christian living. The believer becomes powerless, cut off from the life of Christ.

Broken fellowship with God guarantees unpleasant fellowship with other people. Spouses, for instance, cannot live together in harmony until the believer relates to God in fellowship. In the same way, believers cannot relate to one another as God intends until each believer relates to God in fellowship. The truth of the matter is "that fellowship with God and the Son was to issue in fellowship with other believers."¹⁶

We need fellowship with God before we can have fellowship with others. Our Lord was adamant: "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Bickering and fighting among believers is a sign that one has lost fellowship with God.

It can never be stressed enough: fellowship with God is the power of the spiritual life. Without it, all our works, prayers, alms, financial giving, evangelism, and the like amount to a pile of wood, hay and straw. Without fellowship, all our good works will only make a heap of ashes at the judgment seat of Christ. Scripture guarantees it (1 Cor 3:14–15).

Such a sad outcome for a life's work done in the name of Christianity ought to give us reason for serious thought. We need to pause and reflect.

God's Decision to Share Fellowship with Man

God wants to share His joy and His unshakeable peace with man. That was His original intention when He created man in the garden. God created man for "the praise of His glory" (Isa. 43:7). We will never fully comprehend why the self-sufficient, immutable, triune God, whose joy and peace are undiminished, would say to One another, "Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness" (Gen. 1:26).

You and I are here because of God's decision to bring us forth. He desired to create man in His own likeness. John Walvoord said, "Being in God's image means that humans share, though imperfectly and finitely, in God's nature, that is, in His communicable attributes (life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice), and so have the capacity for spiritual fellowship with Him."¹⁷

Isaiah, the prophet, revealed God's purpose in creation. "I will ... bring my sons from afar ... whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (Isa. 43:6–7 NRSV). Fellowship, which constitutes praise of His glory, was the reason God created man. Without fellowship, man cannot worship God, let alone glorify Him.

The reason we struggle to fulfill God's purpose is because Satan, God's archenemy, opposes us with every fiber of his being.

Man's Fellowship with God

Man Created in God's Image

How did God accomplish fellowship with man? To answer this question, we must examine creation.

God is perfect and His work is perfect. This implies that Adam and the woman were perfect when God created them. Moses confirmed, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Adam and the woman were created in God's image, and their perfection made it possible for them to enjoy fellowship with God.

Man in the State of Innocence

Innocence means, "blamelessness, freedom from sin and guilt."¹⁸ Recall, God can only fellowship with that which is holy. Adam was holy, morally pure, with no impurity of any kind. Simply, he was in a state of innocence. He knew nothing about sin. His nature was sinless and free. He "was made in the moral and spiritual image of God, a free rational being."¹⁹ This enabled Adam to have fellowship with God because he met the criteria of holiness.

In Adam's innocence, he did not need God's imputed righteousness and eternal life. In innocence Adam experienced ultimate fellowship with God because of his perfection. God would visit him and his wife, Eve, in the cool of the day for fellowship. Until the fall, everything was going well for man. He had no cause to be afraid, for the concept of fear was totally foreign to his nature. He had perfect rapport with his Creator-God. God brought man into existence and simultaneously shared fellowship with him. This is God's grace.

Conduit of Fellowship between God and Man

In eternity past, when God thought of man, He planned a conduit or pipeline of fellowship. This conduit is the link to His holiness. Any degree of sin ruptures it and breaks fellowship. When God created Adam and the woman, He simultaneously activated the conduit of fellowship. Their fellowship flowed freely between God's Spirit and their human spirit and was undisturbed until something terrible happened. Adam sinned against God and ruptured the only link that connected him with God. Fellowship was broken, causing many ongoing ramifications.

Let us look at four of the benefits of fellowship:

- ✦ Sharing in God's love, joy, and unshakeable peace through the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).
- ✦ Sharing in Christ's suffering (Phil. 3:10)
- ✦ Sharing one's material goods with other believers (Rom. 12:13)
- ✦ Having Christ-centered social interaction through His Word, including the communion service and prayer (Acts 2:42).

CHAPTER 3

Man's Broken Fellowship with God

Pride is a hidden cancer of the soul, so elusive it often evades detection until it is too late.

Review

In chapter 1 we answered the question, “Who is God?” We studied God’s holiness and His intolerance of unholiness. In chapter 2 we examined the word *fellowship*, briefly studied fellowship among the Godhead, and reflected on God’s decision to share His fellowship with man. We also looked at man in his state of innocence and learned about the conduit of fellowship between God and man.



In this section we will examine these topics:

1. Satan the tempter
2. The fall of man
3. The effect of the fall
4. The sin nature
5. Ongoing conflict in the soul

Satan the Tempter

This is not an extensive study. We simply want to tie the devious work of Satan's evil genius to the fall of man. We will review some passages of Scripture to understand what happened in heaven between God and Satan in order to comprehend what transpired in the garden between Satan and the woman.

The Bible speaks of Satan as one who "had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28:12). He was, and still is, the beauty of beauties. Portraying him in caricature is deceiving. Contrary to common perception, his appearance is not that of a monster or something worse. He is like "the angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). Prior to his doom, he held the highest office in heaven under the Godhead.

Let us peer through space into heaven and pretend to be present when the first rebellion took place. God gave Satan authority over all angelic creatures. Then Satan's heart became inflated. Ezekiel revealed the source of Satan's pride: "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor" (Ezek. 28:17). "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Prov. 16:18).

Pride! What a destroyer! Ever wonder who originated it? Satan. It was conceived and born the moment he became discontent with the position God had given him. Discontent feeds pride. In essence, pride said, "God, You could have done more; You could have elevated me higher." That's an odd thought at best and blasphemy at worst.

Satan's discontent led to his idea to usurp God's authority. His position as prime minister of the heavenly kingdom was no longer desirable. He wanted to be king. He wanted to be God, the sovereign One. This thought prompted his agenda: "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the

mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13–14). With those five “I wills,” his doom was certain, for God cannot share His glory with anyone (Isa. 42:8).

Satan made a choice from his free will. From his actions, we can see that volition is an issue. J. O. Buswell said,

According to the Bible, then, sin is an act of freewill in which the creature deliberately, responsibly, and with adequate understanding of the issues chose to corrupt the holy character of godliness with which God had endowed His creation ... The denial of free will seems to be purely arbitrary philosophical dogmatism, contrary to the biblical view. If God is rightly angry with sin, then it follows that the sinner is blameworthy—cosmically, ultimately, absolutely ... Sin must be within God’s eternal decree in some sense in which He is not the author of it ... Within the decrees of God, there are decrees of permission of those things of which God Himself is not the author. This is not mere permission of the unavoidable.²⁰

As a consequence of Satan’s rebellion, God demoted him. Satan began a campaign to frustrate God’s plan. First, he deceived one-third of the angels into joining his rebellion to dethrone God. He forever lost not only his fellowship with God, but also his rulership of two-thirds of the angels who remained true to God (Rev. 12:3–4). Second, he went down to the garden and there deceived the woman. This brings us to the fall of man.

The Fall of Man

Satan's evil work gets muddier and nastier. We have briefly examined the creation of man and God's decision to share fellowship with him. When Satan lost his own fellowship with God, jealousy and envy motivated him to work to destroy the fellowship man had with God.

Jealousy is a monstrous sin. Essentially, Satan was saying, "Man, you are perfectly happy and I am not; you have everything and I have lost all. Why should you be happy when I am miserable?"

Satan was determined to deceive our first parents because God's original plan was for man to rule the planet Earth. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

Satan or his demons, the fallen angels, were apparently present when God commissioned Adam as the prime minister of the earthly kingdom. Adam's status was about to end as Satan, in envy, would attack Adam's rulership of the world and his fellowship with God. Jealousy prompted Satan's attack.

Today, believers are Satan's targets. He detests our fellowship with God. Satan, out of envy, fights relentlessly to deprive us of what he lost: indescribable, sensational fellowship with God.

Satan chose to indwell the serpent, which at that time was one of God's most beautiful and attractive creatures. He used the innocent creature to deceive the woman. The important point is Satan deceived the woman into disobeying God. Let us look closely at Satan's shrewdness.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall

not eat from any tree of the garden?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:1-5)

Disobedience is the real issue, which was demonstrated by eating the forbidden fruit. Observe closely what Satan did. First he pricked God's Word with a needle of doubt: "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" All he needed was to instill doubt in the woman.

Doubting God feeds pride. God takes His Word seriously and punishes severely those who doubt Him. We know this because we have seen that the Israelites experienced God's wrath in full measure when they doubted His promise to give them the land (Num. 14:20-24).

Secondly, Satan changed God's Word from "You surely will die" (Gen 2:17) to "You surely will not die!" He added to it and flipped the meaning. In essence, he said, "God was lying to you." One can imagine the woman's adrenaline rush as she pondered all these things. Doubting God's Word is a sin, and acts as a gateway to other sins.

**God takes His Word seriously and punishes severely
those who doubt Him.**

Satan moved in for a strike! Having injected the woman with doubt, he poisoned her with the venom of his original sin. Satan plainly told the woman, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Satan was saying that God was selfish when in fact he was transferring his own selfishness to God.

But that was all the woman needed to hear. The thought of being like God consumed her, just as it had consumed Satan. She connected the three dots: 1) the uncertainty of the accuracy of God’s Word, 2) the idea that God was lying to her about death, and 3) the notion that God was keeping the secret of how to be like Him from her and her husband. She was completely sold.

Not realizing that her conversation with Satan was cloaked in deception, she was moved to try Satan’s suggestion to eat the fruit. “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” (Gen. 3:6–7).

Therein is the summary of the fall! By the time the woman realized she had been deceived by Satan’s scheme, it was too late. The damage had been done; she and her husband had experienced spiritual death instantly. God kept His Word: “for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die”. Both Adam and Eve lost their relationship and fellowship with God. What a tragedy!

The Effect of the Fall

Adam’s sin and resultant broken fellowship with God is referred to theologically as “the fall of man” or, commonly, “the fall.” No one can accurately measure the impact of the fall, but we will try to gain an understanding by looking at five results

Spiritual Death

Almighty God did not hide the consequence of disobedience to His prohibition from Adam. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die". Adam and Eve did not die physically at that time, but both died spiritually, meaning their human spirit ceased to function. Consequently, man lost his line of communication between God's Spirit and his own spirit.

Loss of Relationship with God

Adam had a relationship with Holy God, not on the basis of him possessing God's righteousness, but on the grounds that Adam was created perfect. Adam's sin broke his relationship with God.

Broken Fellowship with God

It is possible to have a relationship without having fellowship. But one cannot have fellowship without having an established relationship. An argument can rupture fellowship between a husband and wife or between friends, but rarely does it lead to a broken relationship. Adam lost both. Loss of fellowship resulted in loss of his spiritual power source, along with loss of God's joy and unshakeable peace. What is more, for the first time, Adam experienced fear: "I was afraid" (Gen. 3:10).

Broken Fellowship between Adam and Eve

Fellowship with God is the prerequisite for harmonious fellowship with others. In other words, broken fellowship with God produces difficulty in our fellowship with others. For instance, Adam and Eve expressed anxiety the moment they lost fellowship with God. The "blame game" was born. First, Adam blamed God. "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12). Second, he shifted the blame to his wife.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Let me put it this way: Adam was angry with his wife. He was saying, "Honey, my failure is your fault." We should not miss this. Undoubtedly, he blamed God for creating the woman because he did not want to take responsibility for his action. Neither did Eve; she in turn blamed Satan. Does it sound familiar? The "blame game" is still with us thousands of years later. Husbands shift their failures to their wives, and wives bitterly reciprocate. Simply put, there is turmoil everywhere because of our broken fellowship with God.

Adam's Loss of Rulership

If you recall, God in creation charged man to rule the world as an extension of His grace. Think of it; man was a coruler with God. That is grace. But, because of man's failure, God transferred the rulership to Satan, "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31). Basically, that was Satan's desire, for he wanted the rulership of heaven and earth that God had.

We are in Satan's domain. He is the ruler of this world and everything herein. This explains his tempting offer to Jesus Christ. "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me'" (Matt. 4:8-9). The offer was authentic. Is Satan capable of blessing man? Yes, he can, but they are counterfeit blessings. Look closely at the above passage. Satan promised to transfer his rulership back to Jesus Christ if only He would "fall down and worship" him. Satan is still desperately seeking worshippers. Remember, he said "I will be like the Most High God" (Isa. 14:14).

Beyond these five effects is the resultant sin nature that we all inherit from our father, Adam (1 Cor. 15:22). The effects of this upon us are so great that we will look at it separately.

The Sin Nature

We define the sin nature as the inherited sin of Adam, which Satan uses to oppose everything divine. There are various descriptions for the sin nature. The apostle Paul referred to it as the “old man” (Col. 3:9 NKJV) or “old self” (Col. 3:9). It is commonly called the “old sin nature,” or simply the “sin nature.” Whatever the reference, it is abhorrent to Holy God, like a disease that infected every cell of Adam’s body when he disobeyed God. The sin nature is genetically passed to all who descend from Adam, “through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

We are sinners, not primarily because of our personal sins but because of Adam’s original sin passed on to us at conception. “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). Every person fathered by a male has this nature. The exception is Jesus Christ. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and uniquely born of a virgin. The sin nature is the source of our personal sin and spiritual conflict in the soul. We are condemned because of Adam’s sin, and our personal sins confirm our status as sinners (Eph. 2:1; John 8:34).

Ongoing Conflict in the Soul

The sin nature is the source of conflict in the soul. It makes us vulnerable to every kind of sin. We deceive ourselves if we think we are immune to any type of sin. The apostle Paul gives us a hint of the battle that rages in every soul, except that of the human nature of Jesus Christ. “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15).

That is an honest assessment of soul conflict. Satan uses the sin

nature to attack God's plan. His attack often yields results in one of three areas of sin: mental sins, overt sins, and verbal sins.

Satan's attack often yields results in one of three areas of sin: mental sins, overt sins, and verbal sins.

Mental Sins

Sin is not just doing the obvious such as murder, adultery, or stealing. Sin equally is entertaining unholy thoughts. Mental sins abound: anxiety, worry, fear, doubt, hatred, anger, envy, bitterness, covetousness, lust, pride, jealousy, and more. King Solomon tells us "the mind of man reflects the man" (Prov. 27:19 NRSV). The Lord highlighted the matter when He lambasted the self-righteous religious crowd: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27–28).

Overt Sins

Even if we could escape the mental sins, which is impossible, overt sin lurks within striking distance to knock us down. The truth is that one cannot be guilty of an overt sin without first being guilty of mental sins. We know the story of David, "He saw a woman bathing ... and inquired about the woman ... sent messengers and took her" (2 Sam. 11:2–4). We can literally see his thoughts turning to actions. Overt sins are more obvious. They are visible actions that involve contact with other people, including but not limited to murder, stealing, adultery, promiscuity, gluttony, drunkenness, and drug abuse.

Verbal Sins

James hits the target. "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:2). Mitton grasped the truth. "Complete mastery over evil and total freedom from sin is not found in human life. If sin cannot work its way in by any other means it can gain entry into a man's spoken words."²¹

Every sin is horrible compared to God's holiness, but a sin of the tongue is so awful that it made the list of the seven sins that God hates (Prov. 6:16). Referring to the tongue and its devastating effect, James says, "It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). The tongue is the vehicle for verbal sins. They include vituperation, gossip, maligning, judging, lying, cursing, and others.

**We struggle because of the ongoing conflict between
God's power and the power of the sin nature.**

We see what we are up against! We can understand why the greatest apostle lamented, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). If Paul could say this, none of us are immune. We retreat to self-deception and wade in self-absorption when we think that we are no longer in a spiritual struggle. We struggle because of the ongoing conflict between God's power and the power of the sin nature that is constantly active within us.

"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Gal. 5:17). How can a believer have daily victory over these three areas of sin? For one thing, fellowship with God must be restored and kept up to date.

CHAPTER 4

God's Grace in Restoring Relationship

God's grace is an aid for helpless man; it is not for man to abuse.

You and I can never fathom why a self-sufficient God created Adam and Eve in the first place, knowing they would disobey Him. We have already mentioned two reasons according to Scripture: first, His glory, and second, man's rulership.

Another reason was to demonstrate grace. Though His creatures fell by their sin, God still provided a grace solution for them. The apostle Paul wrote this about sin and God's grace: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5:19–21 NRSV).

Review

Thread by thread, we are weaving the tapestry of restoration of broken fellowship. We have already woven the threads of God's holiness, the panoramic view of fellowship, and man's broken fellowship with God.

We have seen the disastrous effects of the fall. Adam's sin resulted in loss of relationship and loss of fellowship with God. But God in

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His perfect grace had a solution. Before He could restore the broken fellowship, He first had to restore the broken relationship.

All threads of the previous chapters are important. Those of God's perfect holiness and His intolerance of anything less are particularly crucial to the foundation of this chapter.



In this chapter we will examine,

1. Human effort to appease God
2. The prototype gospel in the garden
3. God's grace provision for Adam and Eve
4. Adam and Eve's response to God's offer of grace

Human Effort to Appease God

In the last chapter, we briefly discussed the fall. Let us pick up that discussion to examine what Adam and the woman did to get right with God after they had disobeyed Him. Both "knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (Gen. 3:7). They recognized the sin within themselves and, with human effort, attempted to hide their sin.

It has been said before, but cannot be said enough: God is perfect; man is not. An imperfect man can never impress a holy God. God is only impressed by what He does for and through us. It is that simple. Mankind's relationship with God was broken, and they tried to repair it through their own efforts. They tried to work their way back into relationship with God by covering their sin.

We do the same thing when we try to establish a relationship with God by our own works. Any attempt to gain salvation by working

our way to heaven is fruitless: "by works of the law shall no one be justified" (Gal. 2:16). God rejected Adam and the woman's attempt to restore their relationship with Him, but He provided a divine solution, the only solution. He gave the first gospel, the promise of a future Messiah (Gen. 3:15).

The Prototype Gospel in the Garden

Speaking to the serpent, God said, I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen. 3:15).

Imagine, if you will, the first evangelistic crusade in history. On the grounds were Satan and Adam and the woman. The guest speaker was none other than Yahweh, God's Son, the visible member of the Godhead, the greatest Evangelist the world will ever know. It has been said that Genesis 3:15 "is the *protevangeliium*, the first announcement of the gospel in Scripture."²² How true! What Genesis 3:15 was to the people of the Old Testament is what John 3:16 is to the people of the New Testament. Genesis 3:15 was the promise of a future Savior; John 3:16 is the fulfillment of that promise.

It all began on that eventful day when Satan was able to separate Adam from God by deceiving the woman. The woman sinned because she was deceived; Adam sinned willfully. Having judged them, the Lord made a startling promise to both Adam and the woman. Observe the Lord's message: it begins with "I," because God is the Initiator. Grace begins with God and ends with God. How can anyone miss the point? The gospel is grace.

Since Satan instigated the fall, the first judgment is on him: "I will put enmity Between you and the woman." There, in the garden of Eden, Yahweh announced the unceasing tension between Satan and mankind. His message of hope continued, "Between your seed and

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

The phrase "between your seed and her seed" is a reference to the conflict between Satan and the demons ("your seed") and Jesus Christ ("her seed," the seed of the woman Mary).

The very One who made this promise would, thousands of years later, be the One who would come to earth in human form and fulfill it. Think of it. You and I will never fully comprehend that God the Son stepped out of His glory to make a full payment for our sins (John 17:5).

God announced the birth of a promised Messiah before Adam and the woman had their first child. Looking back, we can see this was a prophecy of Jesus Christ and his virgin birth.

Life is in the Head

There is no life in the heel; life resides in the head. Human life can proceed if one's heel is damaged, but if the head is severely damaged, life ceases. I witnessed a dramatic example of this years ago while working in a hospital. I walked into a patient's room to see a beautiful young lady lying on a bed. Both her arms and legs had been amputated, but she was still full of life because life resides in the head. Years have gone by, but that image of her is still fresh in my mind. What a startling reminder of how fragile our bodies are.

So, when the Lord said that Satan would bruise the Savior on the heel, He was simply saying that Satan would oppose and attack Jesus Christ in His life on earth, the first advent.

By contrast the Bible states, "He shall bruise you on the head." Jesus Christ is victorious over Satan because life is in the head. Jesus Christ crushed Satan's head on the cross, where the Lord shouted, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Satan's head has been crushed. He is defeated and just running around until he has no more breath left in him, like a chicken with its head cut off. He is working to postpone his inevitable punishment in the lake of fire at the end of the world, but he has been defeated by our victorious Savior. That is the good news that was preached in the garden, and that is the same message being preached today. Christ has won the victory.

The gospel in the garden was a future promise: I *will* send a Savior. The good news of John 3:16 is a fulfillment of it:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.
(Gal. 4:4–5)

God kept His promise.

God's Grace Provision for Adam and Eve

Man's sin offended God's holiness and therefore a penalty must be paid. "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). When God turned to Adam and the woman for payment, they were bankrupt, unable to pay the demand of justice. Someone else had to offer a ransom to satisfy the justice of God.

So God did something spectacular. He brought a substitute. He slaughtered an animal, for "without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). This was the first time an animal had been sacrificed, and it looked forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, "a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

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“And the LORD made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21 NRSV). Who chose the animal? God! Who slaughtered it? God! Who skinned the animal? God! Who clothed them? God!

God does all the work in both restoration of relationship and restoration of fellowship. “But by His doing, you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:30). When we fully understand grace, that knowledge will deflate our pride, erasing any idea that we can earn our salvation—or impress God for blessing.

Who chose the animal? God! Who slaughtered it?
God! Who skinned the animal? God! Who clothed
them? God!

Similarly, the clothing of Adam and Eve with garments of skin was synonymous with clothing a believer with God’s righteousness. “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). “I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). God’s slaughtering of the animal pointed to the Lamb of God, His Son, the seed of Mary.

Adam and Eve’s Response to God’s Offer of Grace

Adam and Eve responded positively! Matthew Henry states, “By faith in this promise [of Genesis 3:15], our first parents, and their patriarchs before the flood, were justified and saved.”²³ God initiated the redemption solution. In anticipation of the promised Messiah, Adam and Eve simply believed, by faith alone, in Yahweh alone.

You ask, “How can we be sure that they believed the message of

Genesis 3:15?" The answer is in how Eve referred to their first son, Cain. "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD'" (Gen. 4:1). The word *manchild* literally means "man, the LORD [Yahweh]." ²⁴ They thought that their son was the fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 3:15. They were wrong. God did not tell them when the seed would come. But their actions show that they believed the message of faith alone, in Yahweh alone.

**God's spoken Word is both light that illuminates a
dark heart and life that gives eternal life
when received.**

Keep in mind, restoration is the work of God. Man messed things up; God fixed them. This is *grace*! Grace defines God's policy.

Consider three spiritually dead creatures, one angelic (Satan) and two human (Adam and Eve). All heard the message loud and clear. All understood it, because the Word in itself is light (Ps. 119:105). Its luminary power dispels darkness whenever it is spoken. "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). "God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). God's spoken Word is both *light* (Ps. 119:105) that illuminates a dark heart, and *life* that gives eternal life when received (John 6:63).

Though Adam's and Eve's hearts were darkened by sin, they had free will and the light of God's Word illuminated them. James J. Stewart states, "It is the word of God that brings the light of Jesus Christ into our darkened heart."²⁵ To infer that an unbeliever cannot comprehend the gospel is to downplay the power of the Word. Think of it: Satan understood what the message meant; therefore right away he began a scheme to attack God's plan.

Satan's Retaliation

Adam and Eve had two sons: first Cain, then Abel. Satan, who was “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44), incited Cain to kill Abel. But God’s plan was greater than Satan’s. Adam and Eve gave birth to another son, Seth, and many more thereafter. The mandate “be fruitful and multiply” was being fulfilled.

Next, Satan attempted to corrupt the world of Noah’s day (Gen. 6:4). His aim was to corrupt the entire human race so that there would not be a righteous human being on earth who could fulfill God’s plan of Genesis 3:15. Smart move! But God responded with greater force and thwarted Satan’s attempt. He flooded the earth while saving Noah and his family, the righteous ones (Gen. 6:1–9; 7: 1, 17–22). Consequently the human race, necessary to fulfill the “seed” of the woman, was preserved. God kept His promise.

* * *

In all, God, in a consummate act of grace, restored Adam and Eve’s relationship with Him and made it permanent. From that time forward, a believer’s relationship with God through faith in Christ became irrevocable. More grace! What is revocable is fellowship, a subject we will explore as our study progresses.

In the next chapter, we will dig deeper into the subject of animal sacrifice.

CHAPTER 5

An Overview of Animal Sacrifice

Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.
(Heb. 9:22)

Review

We continue interweaving each new topic with the old. So far we have progressed from God, our starting point, to the creation of man and his fall. In chapter 4, we noted Adam and Eve's fruitless effort to appease God and God's grace initiation in the restoration of man. God gave a prototype gospel in the garden, where He promised a Savior. God alone took care of the redemption solution for Adam and the woman and all mankind.

Adam and the woman responded positively to God's offer of grace, and put their faith alone in Yahweh alone, the seed of the woman. God slaughtered the first innocent animal to be a covering for their sin. That was a prototype of God's grace to sinful human beings.



Tying our past study to this chapter, we look at five topics:

1. The origin of animal sacrifice
2. What is a type?

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3. God's intended purpose in animal sacrifice
4. Three unique sacrifices in Scripture
5. Animal sacrifice and the ark of the covenant

The Origin of Animal Sacrifice

God knew that Adam and Eve would utilize their God-given free will to go against His prohibition. Nevertheless, He created them. His omniscience knows all the events of human history, from creation to the end of time. He knows the content of my next paragraph, even though I have not formulated my thought completely. God's omniscience amazed David. "Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all" (Ps. 139:4).

Within the omniscience of God was the plan for creation, knowledge of the fall, judgment, the redemption solution, restoration, and much more. God timed every event (Eccl. 3:1–8). Amazing, isn't it? For example, God knew, way before He promised to send a Savior, that the seed of the woman would actually come several thousand years later. In contrast, Adam and Eve did not know what God knew.

God slaughtered an animal as atonement for their sin which demonstrates grace in the plan of redemption. This was the origin of animal sacrifice, which anticipated the "once for all" sacrifice of His Son, the Lamb of God (John 1:29). "God discarded their fig leaves and instituted His own plan, blood sacrifice."²⁶ God's action was a prototype, which raises a question regarding the word *type*.

What Is a Type?

"A type is a person or event that foreshadows or symbolizes another."²⁷ God, in the Old Testament, employed the use of events, figures, and

persons as a “shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:17). For example:

- ✦ The Bible portrayed Melchizedek, a king-priest, as a type of Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:1–6, 17).
- ✦ The Jewish Passover event of the Old Testament and the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:21) used for that event were types of Jesus: “Christ, our Passover” (1 Cor. 5:7).
- ✦ The animal that God slaughtered in the garden was a type of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.
- ✦ Even the ark of the covenant was a type of Jesus Christ. We will cover this in more detail as our study progresses.

God’s Intended Purpose in Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice was a God-ordained institution. From the garden forward, it was practiced throughout history until the death of Jesus Christ. Abel, Adam’s second son, followed in God’s footsteps. “And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering” (Gen. 4:4). God’s purpose for initiating animal sacrifice was twofold. He used it as both a type and a teaching aid.

As a Type

Recall, a type is a person or event that foreshadows or symbolizes another. Looking back, God knew that His promise to Adam and Eve would not be fulfilled right away. While mankind waited, He ordained the use of animal sacrifice, a type of Jesus Christ, to atone for man’s sin.

You may ask, “What is atonement?” The Hebrew verb *kapar* is

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rendered as “atonement” in our English Bible. It simply means “to cover over, atone, propitiate, pacify.”²⁸ In other words, it means “cover over by an expiatory sacrifice.”²⁹ In its noun form, it means “mercy seat; throne of mercy.”³⁰ “This noun form of *kapar* has been variously translated as “mercy seat” (KJV, RSV), “cover” (NEB), “lid” (TEV), “throne of mercy” (JB), and “throne” (Knox).”³¹

Animal Sacrifice as a Teaching Aid

Animal sacrifice was equally a teaching aid. Growing up in a village in Nigeria, I remember vividly how we used to haul a small bag of pebbles to school. Carrying them daily was so tiresome that I was looking forward to the day when I would outgrow the task.

What was the purpose? The pebbles were used as a teaching aid to help us understand arithmetic. For example, consider the simple equation of ten plus ten equals twenty. In first grade, we did not know how to attain the answer. The teacher would ask us to count out two piles of ten pebbles each. He would then asked us to combine the piles and recount. There it was before our eyes: twenty! The concept of addition was engraved in our minds. When we got to second grade, we said bye-bye to pebbles, but we always remembered the concept we learned from using them.

Similarly, God used animal sacrifice to teach Old Testament believers an unforgettable biblical truth. The book of Leviticus describes the many types of animals that were sacrificed: goats, bulls, rams, lambs, and even doves and pigeons by the poor. One of the many lessons was that animal sacrifice is tiresome. “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb. 10:11). Visualize a priest, covered in blood, smelling like a goat, standing daily, ministering at the altar before God, and slaughtering one animal after another.

If you were that priest, you would be slaughtering perhaps a hundred or more animals daily. Think of the weight such a task would exert

on you and your family. No doubt you would be looking forward to the time when such an assignment would end. The priests of the Old Testament would have their hopes fulfilled by the promised Messiah, who, “having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). Those who realized that the Messiah, the true Lamb of God, had arrived waved good-bye to animal sacrifice just as I had done to my bag of pebbles.

The Helplessness of the Sacrificial Animal

Sacrificial animals are innocent and helpless. That is the picture God wants us to see. Their helplessness is observable. The animals went wherever they were led, either to pasture or to slaughter. They did not resist their master’s staff. The only time they cried out or screamed was when their throats were cut. In view of all this, it is clear why God portrayed the humanity of Christ as a Lamb.

The Helplessness of the Lamb of God

A lamb is totally dependent for feeding and protection. It is helpless. Gently it follows the shepherd. This was also true of the Lamb of God. “I can do nothing on My own initiative” (John 5:30). He was always obedient to God the Father.

Considering His silence, Isaiah wrote, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away” (Isa. 53:7–8).

All four gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—portrayed the silence maintained by the Lamb of God en route to Golgotha, the place of sacrifice. When Caiaphas, the high priest, questioned Jesus Christ, He “kept silent” (Mark 14:61). When Pilate questioned Him, “He did not answer him with regard to

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even a single charge" (Matt. 27:14). This fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, "He did not open His mouth."

In eternity past, the three members of the Godhead decided that Jesus Christ would come to earth to be the sacrificial Lamb. "A body You have prepared for Me; In whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the scroll of the book it is written of Me) To do Your will, O God'" (Heb. 10:5-7). Make no mistake: Calvary was God's will for His Son.

Now, take a trip back two thousand years and observe the humanity of Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the shepherding hand of God the Father. He was totally obedient. He did not resist God's plan for His life. He did not react negatively to any authority, divine or human. He was silent, like a lamb that is led to slaughter.

As a Lamb, He was at the mercy of His shearers; as God, His shearers were at His mercy. As the Creator-God, Jesus Christ could have stopped the shearers. We learn from His own assertion: "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53). But instead He voluntarily laid down His life. Therein is love. "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Jesus Christ is God and man. As God, He had power to resist the cross, but He refrained. He had power to wipe out His accusers, but He resisted the temptation. He assumed the nature of a sheep, silent before its shearers. What does a sheep do when its throat is being cut? Scream *baah*! Jesus too screamed at the altar of Golgotha, where the Father *crushed* Him.

The Screaming Lamb of God

“Jesus cried out, ‘Eli, Eli La’ma sabach-tha’ni?’ that is ‘My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” (Matt. 27:46 NRSV). This was the only time that God’s Lamb screamed. He didn’t scream when He was tortured beyond recognition as per Isaiah’s prophecy (52:14). He screamed only when He came in contact with the Father’s judgment. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf” (2 Cor. 5:21). He was “smitten by God, and afflicted ... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ... it was the will of the LORD to bruise him” (Isa. 53:4–5, 10 NRSV).

That was what God did for us all. He offered His Son as a sacrifice and *crushed* Him for us all. Jesus Christ has done all the work, and God’s justice has been satisfied. Therein is a picture of God’s amazing grace. To think that we, in our sinful state, can add anything to the finished work of Christ on the cross is an insult to God, and it is arrogant. We cannot do anything outside of God’s grace policy to earn acceptance before Him. We establish a relationship with God and appropriate eternal life by an act of faith alone, in Christ alone.

Likewise, restoration to fellowship does not depend on us. It is accomplished by acknowledging our sins to God alone. *No work is required*. God has done all the work. That is what grace is all about.

Three Unique Sacrifices in Scripture

We have noted that animal sacrifice was a type of Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that God is perfect and His work is perfect. He alone initiated the redemption solution after the fall.

In this portion of our work, we will study three sacrifices that God

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used to illustrate His grace. Notice how in each case God provided the sacrifice.

Animal Sacrifice in the Garden

After the fall, while Adam and Eve were in a state of total depravity, God, in His matchless grace, stepped forward and took charge. Consider His actions: First, God selected an animal “without blemish” for His sacrifice (Ex. 12:5). Second, God slaughtered and skinned it. Third, He clothed Adam and Eve with the skin of the animal, a symbol of God’s righteousness (Gen. 3:21).

We ask, “What were Adam and Eve doing?” Nothing. God performed all the work, leaving them nothing to contribute. Adam and Eve didn’t perish; an animal perished instead.

Abraham’s Unique Sacrifice

You are probably familiar with God’s testing of Abraham. Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Without retelling the story, we note that the focus was Abraham’s obedience. He went to Mount Moriah for the sacrifice, and there, “Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son” (Gen. 22:10 NRSV). Suddenly a voice came “from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham! ... Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.’ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns” (Gen. 22:11–13 NRSV).

This was the second time that God personally brought a sacrificial animal. Talk about grace! Isaac didn’t have to die because a ram died in his place. It was a substitute. More than that, Abraham did not pay for the ram. It was a free gift from God. *Grace* is highlighted for us to behold.

Let us pause for a moment and reflect. Does this scene seem familiar to you? It should, for it is a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ.

The Sacrifice of God's Son

The previous sacrifices are types, rituals pointing to reality. Now we come to the third and the final sacrifice. Jesus Christ was the unique sacrifice. He was the long-awaited Savior who had come in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). God gave us the greatest gift of all time, His Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul called Him "the indescribable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15). God's Lamb superseded all animal sacrifices. "This He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27). His sacrifice brought all animal sacrifices to an end.

What was our condition when Christ was on the cross? Like Adam, every one of us was spiritually dead, totally depraved (Rom. 3:23). We could not offer God anything. Grace took over from the beginning. To satisfy His justice, God offered His perfect Son. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

**God's Son stepped forward and received the full
measure of God's wrath as a substitute for us.**

See what God did? We were all lost, destitute, and sentenced to perish. God put forth the one and only qualified offering, His Son, Jesus Christ, as a substitute for us all. Imagine, the cumulative wrath of God toward the sins of Adam and Eve and all the sins of the world was directed toward every one of us. Amazingly, God's Son stepped forward and received the full measure of God's wrath that had been intended for us. The prophet Isaiah graphically stated, "the LORD was pleased to crush Him" (Isa. 53:10).

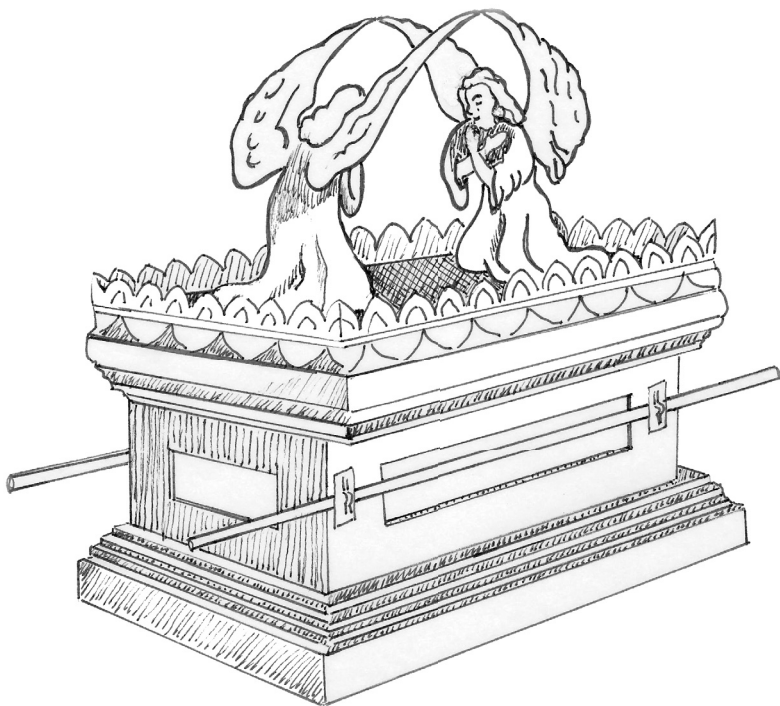
The Hebrew word *daka* is helpful in shedding light on Christ's

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suffering. It means “crushed, humbled, afflicted, or broken in pieces.”³² God crushed His Son mercilessly as a sacrifice. He humbled Him.

Clearly, Abraham’s ultimate test, to sacrifice his son, was a foreshadowing of God’s supreme sacrifice yet to come. Isaac was Abraham’s promised son; similarly, Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, was the promised Messiah. The ram was a substitute for Isaac; Jesus Christ was a substitute for us. There is the difference! He took our place.

Animal Sacrifice and the Ark of the Covenant



Understanding this portion of our study is a must if we are to have

a real appreciation of God's grace toward us regarding sin and forgiveness. It will give us a glimpse of how God handles our sins.

In this chapter we have intertwined four essential threads: the origin of animal sacrifice, understanding biblical types, God's intended purpose in animal sacrifice, and the three unique sacrifices in Scripture. Now, we take on the fifth and final strand, the ark of covenant.

The Description of the Ark of Covenant

We have noted that the ark of the covenant was a type of Jesus Christ. The word *ark* means box or chest, and it held items related to God's covenant with Israel. We will only examine the three parts of the ark pertinent to our study: the material used in its construction, the significance of its covering (lid), and the two cherubim (angels).

The two materials used in the ark's construction, gold and wood, typified Jesus Christ's unique union: He was truly God and truly man. "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). "Jesus," His name, indicates His humanity and "Christ," His title of Messiah, indicates His deity.

The Wood

The ark of the covenant was built with the highest quality material, acacia wood (Ex. 25:10), sometimes called iron wood.³³ "It is a hard wood, so resistant to heat and decay that it has been described as indestructible."³⁴ The material was both a type and a teaching aid. The quality speaks of the impeccability of the human nature of Jesus Christ. His body was incorruptible even in the grave. Scripture says, "For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let the Holy One see corruption" (Acts 2:27).

Gold

The wooden ark was overlaid “with pure gold, within and without” (Ex. 25:11). Gold is not subject to tarnish, which speaks of the deity of Jesus Christ. “Thou art the same, and thy years will never end” (Heb. 1:12 NRSV). The gold covering the indestructible acacia speaks of two natures, God and man. The gold and the wood both retained their properties 100 percent. The incarnate Christ is truly God, truly man, inseparably united in One Person for all eternity.

The Mercy Seat

Before we can elaborate on the mercy seat, let us define our terms. “Mercy” is the act of God that withholds from man the punishment man deserves. Mercy is an extension of God’s unfailing love to man. For instance, Adam and Eve in their disobedience deserved alienation from God. Mercy intervened and held off this disaster. Grace stepped forward with a solution to the problem.

David Jeremiah brilliantly contrasts mercy and grace:

- ♦ Mercy withholds the knife from the heart of Isaac. Grace provides a ram in the thicket (Gen. 22:11–14).
- ♦ Mercy runs to forgive the prodigal son. Grace throws a party with a robe, a ring, and a fattened calf (Luke 15:20–24).
- ♦ Mercy hears the cry of the thief on the cross. Grace promises paradise that very day (Luke 23:39–43).
- ♦ Mercy converts Paul on the road to Damascus. Grace calls him to be the great apostle (Acts 9:1–6, 17).

Mercy withholds from us what we deserve. Grace gives us what we do not deserve.³⁵

The mercy seat was a lid that covered the ark. "Seat" in this context is a place or a site. The mercy seat is "a place of propitiatory atonement."³⁶ Hershberger correctly states, "The Ark especially emphasizes the PERSON of Jesus, while the Mercy Seat emphasizes His purpose."³⁷ Its name says it all: mercy seat. It was a meeting point between Holy God and sinful man. "There I will meet with you, from above the mercy seat" (Ex. 25:22). We cannot appreciate how important the mercy seat was until we consider the elements that were inside the ark. They are teaching aids.

The Elements Inside the Ark and Their Symbolism

Inside the ark were three elements: the tablet of the law, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. They symbolized Israel's spiritual failures.

The tablets of the law were symbols of Israel's rebellion against God's law (Ex. 25:16; Deut. 31:26).

The pot of manna was a symbol of disobedience to God's mandate. God commanded the Israelites to gather from the field enough food for the day. "They did not listen to God" (Ex. 16:20). Rather, they gathered more than a day's worth (Ex. 16:20–21). So God told Moses to put a pot of manna in the ark as a constant reminder of their sin (Ex. 16:34).

Aaron's rod that budded was a symbol of Israel's rebellion. God appointed Aaron as a leader; the people questioned his authority. To prove to the people that Aaron was His chosen leader, God caused Aaron's wooden staff, or rod, to bud. God told Moses to put the budded rod inside the ark as a symbol of Israel's rebellion against God's authority.

These three sins, along with continual rebellion and disobedience against God's ordinances, characterized God's chosen people, Israel. Their behavior was so abhorrent to God that He sharply castigated

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

them, calling them “stiff-necked” (Ex. 32:9) and “obstinate people” (Ex. 33:3), a “sinful nation, a people with iniquity, offspring of evil doers” (Isa. 1:4). This is the backdrop against which we will see the wonder of God’s matchless grace.

How the Ark Functioned in Atonement

Consider Psalm 85:10: “Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Note: the people failed God, but God did not fail them. Rather, He made provision for their atonement. This is a picture of grace kissing mercy.

Despite Israel’s rebellious attitude, God kept His covenant with them. God does not and cannot tolerate sin. Israel’s sin created a *big* separation between them and God. Isaiah clearly states, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Their sins needed to be atoned for before God’s justice could be satisfied.

God instituted a system for atonement of Israel’s sins. According to God’s instruction, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year. There, he atoned for the sins of the people, Israel. First the priest atoned for his own sin. He slaughtered a bull and took some of the blood and sprinkled it on the front of the mercy seat. Then he went through the same procedure with a goat to atone for the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:11–16).

The Significance of the Blood on the Mercy Seat

Herein is grace: “Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.” To boldly speak on grace, one must first understand the significance of the blood on the mercy seat. We already know the contents of the ark: a tablet of the Mosaic law, a pot of manna, and a rod that budded, each a depiction of sin. Remember, these sins created a barrier between God and His

people Israel. God accepted this atonement, which covered these sins for a year through the sprinkled blood on the mercy seat.

The Two Cherubim

On the ark, there were two golden angels, one on each end, looking down onto the mercy seat. These cherubim represented God's righteousness and justice. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne" (Ps. 89:14). They speak of how God deals with mankind. Whatever righteousness demands, justice fulfills. For example, God's righteousness demands that sin be removed from God's sight. Justice covers sin to satisfy the demands of righteousness. That is where sacrifice fits into our study.

The blood on the mercy seat literally covered the sins of Israel from God's sight. Consequently, when the righteousness of God and the justice of God, represented by the two cherubim, looked down, they no longer saw the sins; they saw the blood of the innocent bull that has covered them. God's justice is satisfied because God's righteous demand has been met. In the Old Testament, God, in His infinite wisdom, found a way to deal with man's sin problem.

Before we end this section, take time to read and meditate on this passage about God's grace provision for sin. "When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of the meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel" (Lev. 16:17).

Remember, when it comes to solving the sin-problem,

- ✦ God does all the work: *grace*.
- ✦ The people of Israel were not to help in the sacrifice: *grace*.
- ✦ They were not asked to wail and be remorseful: *grace*.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

- ✦ God, through the priest, did all the work. God was satisfied and acquitted them of the penalty of their sins, not because they did anything to impress God. Rather, God was satisfied on the basis of the blood on the mercy seat. *This is grace magnified.*

CHAPTER 6

The Horror of the Cross

The cross of Christ is not really the wood on which Christ was crucified; instead, it is His death by which man's sin problem was solved.

—Chinyere Onwubiko

The scriptural indictment is in: those who trample God's grace have little or no knowledge of the horror of the cross. These people, unbelievers and believers alike, carry backpacks full of human works to the cross, in anticipation of earning extra points with God. Unbelievers do it to establish a relationship with God; believers do it to reestablish fellowship. That is tragic. If we had even a small understanding of the horror of the cross, of God's justice, of the extent of His wrath poured out to the fullest measure on His Son, and of what it *cost* Christ to secure our so-great salvation, we would be appalled to think we could add even one iota of our own work to the ransom that Christ paid on our behalf to satisfy divine justice.

This section is dedicated to anyone who thinks he can add any work to the finished work of Christ on the cross. The demand of God's justice regarding man's sin was totally satisfied when Jesus Christ, in great agony, shouted, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The word *finished* is in perfect tense in the Greek. This means that what is finished stands finished for all eternity. In layman's terms, it means that the bank has received the final payment for man's sin debt. The receipt reads "paid in full." This matter is closed forever.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

“Truly no man can ransom himself, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of his life is costly, and can never suffice” (Ps. 49:7–8 RSV); but “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” and by His “blood didst ransom men for God” (Rev. 5:12, 9 RSV). “He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12 NRSV).

Review

In chapter 1, we visited the holiness of God. Then we examined the panoramic view of fellowship. In chapter 2, we took a glance at man’s broken fellowship with God. The next chapter was used to examine God’s grace in the restoration of fallen man. Intertwining our threads, chapter 5 gave an overview of animal sacrifice. There, it was understood that all animal sacrifices were a type pointing to Jesus Christ, the real Lamb of God. These studies prepared us for this important chapter.

We will see that the cross of Calvary is central to our tapestry. Every thread of our previous work is tied to the cross. We will trace our weaving from the cross back to the first animal sacrifice in Scripture, to the ark of the covenant, and more. We will see that the cross is where God, in His justice, dealt once and for all with the issue of man’s sin. “For Christ also died for sins once for all” (1 Peter 3:18).



In view of our objective, we will study:

1. The cross explained
2. The horror of death on a cross
3. The rugged road to Golgotha
4. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God

5. Jesus Christ represented by the ark
6. Jesus Christ, the mercy seat

The Cross Explained

A cross, as it relates to our study, is made of two crossed pieces of heavy timber. Many shapes have been suggested, but debating them is beyond the scope of our work. The cross is an important symbol of the death of Christ, but sadly many have placed a value on the symbol itself instead of what it represents: Christ's death, "even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). Some wear a cross for a charm. Others use it for protection. There is no power in the symbol; the power lies in the death of Christ, the omnipotent one. In the same way, there was no value attached to the Old Testament altars. The value was placed on the sacrifices made there. I seriously doubt if anyone ever wore an image of an altar or used it to ward off evil.

Man has always been fascinated with wonders. Consider the bronze serpent Moses made in the wilderness when the Israelites sinned against God. It was a type of Jesus Christ (John 3:14–15). But after Moses' death, it became an object of idol worship until Hezekiah destroyed it. He "broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan" (2 Kings 18:4).

The cross is a reminder of the terrible death Jesus Christ suffered in order to pay for our sins. Even though it symbolizes His unfathomable love for us, it is just that: a symbol. It does not have any special powers, for power is in Christ, the all-powerful One. Anyone who attaches special value to the symbol of a cross risks the danger of being involved in idolatry. Make sure your allegiance is to your Savior and not some symbol.

To an ordinary Roman citizen, a cross symbolized a form of capital

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

punishment reserved for the most deplorable men of the society who were not Romans. It was an inhumane punishment. It was an abhorrent word to a Roman. "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, eyes, his ears."³⁸

On the other hand, the Jews associated the name with a curse. "It is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Gal. 3:1). That explains, in part, why they rejected Jesus Christ: "hence it became a stumbling block to them, for how could one accursed of God be their Messiah?"³⁹ What they did not know was that it was necessary for Christ to hang on the cross that He might redeem us "from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13).

The drama unfolded when the God-Man hung on the cross. Instantly, the cross assumed a different meaning, a place where grace and mercy kissed each other and where God's wrath was poured out to the fullest measure on His Son. It becomes a reminder of the cost of our so-great salvation. The event draws the world's attention and divides it: Christians celebrate what it symbolizes, "to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). On the other hand unbelievers mock it. "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18).

The Horror of Death on a Cross

Admittedly, the graphic description of death on a cross cannot be properly conveyed with words. Though its horror is beyond description scholars have given us enough information to motivate us to reflect on such a death.

Orr and his colleagues described death on a cross in this manner:

The suffering of death by crucifixion was intense, [especially] in hot climates. Severe local inflammation, ... bleeding of the jagged wounds produced traumatic

fever ... The wounds swelled about the rough nails and the torn and lacerated tendons and nerves caused excruciating agony. The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood and a terrific headache ensued ... The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths.⁴⁰

It is not surprising that God should choose the cross as a place to punish our sins. It fits the crime. Christ's suffering and sacrifice culminated on the cross, but it began many long hours before. Let us now trace the steps of those last hours leading up to the crucifixion.

The Rugged Road to Golgotha

The Prayer at Gethsemane

The night before the crucifixion, Jesus Christ went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. Christ, in His omniscience, understood what His human nature would face, and He sought spiritual strength through prayer. Gethsemane's prayer was no ordinary prayer; it is the most passionate prayer ever offered by any man.

Mark tells us that Jesus Christ "was very distressed and troubled" (14:33) when He arrived at Gethsemane. The thought of going to the cross consumed our Savior. He intensely prayed three times, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). In essence, He wished there was another means of providing salvation without Him having to go through this hell on earth. How He wished He would never have to come in contact with our sins. "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44).

In the garden, Jesus was betrayed and arrested by the temple guards.

Jesus' Trials and Torture

The punishment involved in Christ's crucifixion began the journey to Golgotha. Jesus endured several hasty and improper trials. He suffered beating and abuse. "Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, 'Prophecy!' And the officers received Him with slaps in the face" (Mark 14:65). The Roman official Pontius Pilate delivered Him over for punishment, where they stripped off His robe and mercilessly flogged him with Roman flagrum, special whips laced with bone and metal, designed to inflict lacerations and unbearable pain on their victims (Mark 15:15).

Of such a beating, Walvoord comments that often such punishment was fatal.⁴¹ No wonder that "victims of Roman floggings seldom survived."⁴² If the thought of such suffering hasn't had an impact on you, consider a medical doctor's descriptions of the effect of such flogging:

The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles ... Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue.⁴³

Christ's body was so bruised, His face so disfigured that they drew public attention. Centuries prior, Isaiah prophesied, "I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting" (Isa. 50:6). He added, "There were many who were appalled at him—his

appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being" (Isa. 52:14 NIV). That is the scriptural account!

This punishment did not satisfy the religious leaders, and after much pressure from the angry crowd, Jesus was finally sentenced to death. After such barbaric torture, Jesus Christ was forced to carry a heavy, rough cross on His brutally bruised body all the way to Golgotha. He was so weak that He staggered and fell many times, prompting the executioners to recruit a bystander, Simon the Cyrene "to bear His cross" for Him (Matt. 27:32).

Reflect and imagine that we were there almost two thousand years ago. You say, "This teaching is too graphic." It could never be graphic enough, for nothing can convey exactly what Christ went through for you and for me.

The point is made. Central to our study is an understanding of and reverence for Christ's work on the cross. If we understood what Christ went through to secure our salvation, we would come empty-handed, relying on God's mercy and grace alone. It brings to mind the lyrics of the songwriter Augustus M. Toplady:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee;
 Let the water and the blood,
 From Thy wounded side which flowed,
 Be of sin the double cure,
 Save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labor of my hands
 Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
 Could my zeal no respite know,
 Could my tears forever flow,
 All for sin could not atone;
 Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee

Rock of Ages cleft for me ... Thou must save, and Thou alone ... In my hand no price I bring; Simply to the cross I cling ... ⁴⁴

Golgotha

Golgotha was the “place of a skull” (Mark 15:22) outside Jerusalem.⁴⁵ It was an area designated by the Romans for carrying out capital punishment that involved crucifixion. The fact that such cruel punishment was done outside the city alerts us to an Old Testament type: “the priest shall make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. Then he is to bring out the bull to a place outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly” (Lev. 4:20–21). The Old Testament burnt offering, made outside the city, was a type of Jesus Christ. Scripture is fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who was crucified outside the city for the sins of the whole world.

Though Jesus Christ experienced cross-induced suffering beyond measure; it was inconsequential in comparison with the real agony, the indescribable, unparalleled suffering associated with being judged for the sins of the world. It was the intense pain in connection with

the sin of the world that finally caused Him to open His mouth and agonizingly cry out, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matt. 27:46).

What is in your backpack full of human works? Is there anything perfect in there? Anything that can compare with God’s justice and grace? Certainly not! Then why not abandon it and rest in God’s grace?

Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God

The cross is God’s sacrificial altar. Jesus Christ, God’s offering, is the Lamb of God. Upon seeing Jesus, John the Baptist announced, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Remember we previously said that Old Testament animal sacrifices were a type of Jesus Christ. The practice began in the garden of Eden and continued throughout the Jewish era. Consider “the Passover lamb” (Ex. 12:21). It was a type of Jesus Christ, who was the true Passover Lamb, “Christ our Passover [Lamb] ... has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7). “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Rev. 5:12).

The cross—God’s altar. Jesus Christ—God’s offering.

Observe the uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice. In the Old Testament, every priest had to offer an animal sacrifice of a goat or a bull to God. But Jesus Christ became our Great High Priest and offered Himself. The author of the book of Hebrews vividly depicts this.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:11–14)

Therein is the heart of our message. A priest offering animals to God on behalf of other people is one thing, but a priest offering himself for others is another thing altogether. “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Ponder the main points:

- ✦ Jesus Christ was a high priest of the good things to come.
- ✦ He entered through a spiritual tabernacle.
- ✦ He entered with His own blood.
- ✦ He entered the holy place once for all.
- ✦ He obtained eternal redemption for all.
- ✦ Blood of bulls and goats covered the sins of the Jews for only a year.
- ✦ But the blood of Christ covers the sins of believers for all eternity.

We have used the word *blood* extensively. We will thoroughly discuss this in the next chapter.

Jesus Christ Represented by the Ark

When we examined the ark of the covenant, we noticed the whole structure represented the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the God-Man. We also noted the elements within: the tablet of the law, the pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. All depicted sin. But here is the drama: when Jesus Christ hung on the cross, He portrayed the ark of the covenant whereby He carried the sins of the whole world.

The apostles recorded the events of the crucifixion from different vantage points. Paul reminds us of God's judgment: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter puts the finishing touch beautifully: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24).

Where does human work fit in this picture? Nowhere.

Jesus Christ, the Mercy Seat

In the last chapter, we studied the mercy seat. There, we observed its significance: a meeting place between Holy God and sinful man; a place where mercy and grace met. We considered the significance of the blood sprinkled on it. Here, our study takes on a new dimension, explaining why Jesus Christ is called the mercy seat and linking His work on the cross to it.

Remember the importance of the sprinkled blood on the mercy seat? It was the sole basis for God's temporary forgiveness of sins; hence its practice was repeated once a year. With Christ's work, our sins were placed on Him (1 Peter 2:24). Then He took His own blood and covered Himself, thereby covering our sins. "He entered ... through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all" (Heb. 9:11-12). "God displayed publicly as a propitiation in [or by] His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness,

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed” (Rom. 3:25).

God’s righteousness must be satisfied, and it was. How did He accomplish this? The answer is sobering! “God displayed publicly [His Son] as a propitiation.” Jesus Christ “is called propitiation in Romans 3:25 which is understood to be the same as Mercy Seat.”⁴⁶ “The expression ‘mercy seat’ means propitiation.”⁴⁷ “Propitiation means the turning away of wrath by an offering ... propitiation means placating or satisfying the wrath of God by the atoning sacrifice of Christ.”⁴⁸ When God looked down on our sins, they were covered from view. Consequently, “He passed over the sins previously committed.” As was true of the blood of the Passover lamb, so also was true of the blood on the mercy seat: “When I see the blood I will pass over you” (Ex. 12:13).

Paul’s recitation of David’s song speaks volumes. “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. ‘Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account’” (Rom. 4:7–8).

Again, we ask, “Where does human work fit in?” Nowhere! Can you see clearly the basis of God’s forgiveness of our sins? It is the work of Christ on the cross. *Period.* His blood covered our sins. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). “Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Rom. 5:9).

God has shown mercy to man beyond measure. We have a debt we could never pay. He stepped forward and offered His Son as a ransom. Do any of us still cling to our backpack full of human works? If we do, we insult everything God has done for us.

CHAPTER 7

Sin and the Justice of God

**Righteousness and justice are the foundation of
Thy throne. (Ps. 89:14)**

We have now arrived at the midpoint of our study. Here we will refine our focus to prepare for our main topics of confession and repentance. This section will help us see God's holiness more clearly, as well as appreciate the panoramic view of fellowship. It will help us have a better view of man's broken fellowship and God's way of restoration. It will also aid us in viewing and connecting more precisely the threads of animal sacrifice and the horror of the cross.

Review

In the previous chapter, we observed the significance of the cross and the horror of such a death. We looked at the rugged road to Golgotha. We viewed our Savior, Jesus Christ, and saw how the ark was a type of His impeccable nature and why He was called the Lamb of God. We learned why Jesus Christ was called the mercy seat (Rom. 3:25).



In this chapter we will study six topics.

1. Spiritual death satisfies God's holiness
2. The demands of God's justice in relation to sin

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3. Divine imputations
4. Jesus Christ's spiritual death cancels our sin debt
5. The most awful three hours in human history
6. "Tetelestai" and the finished work of Christ

Spiritual Death Satisfies God's Holiness

As we have noted in chapter 3, sin is any action, overt, mental, or verbal, that violates God's holiness. Technically, these individual sins are fragments of the original sin of Adam. Think of the original sin in terms of a grenade. We will soon develop that idea.

Understanding God's holiness is the prerequisite to understanding the extent of God's judgment of our sins on the cross. Recall our study of the subject of God's holiness. God *cannot* tolerate or associate with sin. He *hates* sin. The psalmist said, "righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne" (Ps. 89:14). His righteousness demands that He "will by no means clear the guilty" without payment of the sin debt (Ex. 34:7).

His holiness demands that He make no contact with man until the demands of righteousness have been met, until the penalty for sin is *paid in full*. Charles Ryrie said it this way: "The absolute, innate holiness of God means that sinners have to be separated from Him unless a way can be found to constitute them holy."⁴⁹ God's eternal plan required that Jesus Christ, the righteous One, would die not just a physical death, but a spiritual death, as a substitute for the unrighteous ones (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus Christ is the unique God-Man (1 Tim. 2:5). It was His perfect humanity that bore our sins on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). As God, He could not die, but as man, He could, and He did (Phil. 2:5–8).

The Demands of God's Justice in Relation to Sin

Our God is a God of justice. Millard Erickson said, “[sin] disrupts the very structure of divine spiritual economy, and this disruption or imbalance must necessarily be set right.”⁵⁰ Justice means that God does not show “favoritism or partiality.”⁵¹ Justice must give maximum punishment for sin to satisfy the demands of righteousness. Only when this is done can God be free to forgive and receive anyone who trusts in His Son. The wages of sin is death. That is the demand of righteousness.

Keep in mind that this death is not physical but spiritual. Justice satisfies this demand with the Holy One, Jesus Christ, receiving imputation of our sin, resulting in His spiritual death. The humanity of Jesus Christ died twice on the cross: first, spiritual death when our sins were imputed to Him, then physical death when He gave up His Spirit after he satisfied God's justice (John 19:30).

To delve into this concept more thoroughly, let us look at imputations.

Divine Imputations

The word rendered *imputation* in English comes from Latin. It means “to reckon, to charge to one's account.”⁵² Theologians recognize three basic imputations. These are the imputation of Adam's sin to the human race, the imputation of the sins of the human race to Christ, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the human race.⁵³

The Imputation of Adam's Sin To Man

Scripture affirms, “Sin came into the world through one man” (Rom. 5:12). Genetically, the sin nature is inherited from Adam and is passed to every baby through the male. The sin nature is passed through the

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

male to the egg of the female during fertilization. David said, "I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). One exception: Jesus Christ. He was conceived without the participation of a man, the sin transmitter. His unique conception was by the Holy Spirit; therefore Jesus Christ was born without a sin nature.

Adam willfully sinned against God (1 Tim. 2:14); and therefore God decreed that, through Adam, the old sin nature would pass to all offspring. "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12 RSV). God imputes the original sin of Adam to the baby's old sin nature at the moment of birth, resulting in spiritual death. This is where the indictment fits: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Jesus Christ, our Savior, is the exception because He had no old sin nature.

We are all sinners, but *not* because we sinned; we are sinners because of the imputation of Adam's sin to the genetically formed sin nature. This explains why a baby who is less than a second old is already declared a sinner. Some may be thinking, "That's unfair; how is it that God imputed someone else's sin to an innocent baby? How can we justify including a newborn baby on the list of sinners?"

Many have asked the same question. Yes, we are sinners because of Adam's original sin. The good news is that no single person will ever go to the lake of fire because of Adam's imputed sin.

But if Adam's sin is not the basis for future judgment, what is? This is exactly where the mandate of Scripture to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) will help to answer this question.

The Bible tells us, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18). According to the passage, what is the ground for man's condemnation? Could it be lack

of good works? No! It is lack of faith in Christ alone, “because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

The Imputation of Man’s Sin to Jesus Christ

Here, God’s fairness is on display for the entire human race to behold. We have seen God’s imputation of Adam’s sin to us, which was originally the basis for our condemnation: “through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19).

The Bible tells us that God imputed all sins to Jesus Christ, both Adam’s original sin and all the sins of the entire human race for all time. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21 RSV). Jesus Christ paid for them all and took care of the sin-problem (Col. 2:14).

Thus we learn that man is sent to the lake of fire not because of his sins but because of his rejection of Christ, “because he has not believed.”

Let us take a moment to return to the cross where the imputation of sin to Christ occurred. We will study a third imputation, but first we must understand how Christ’s payment canceled our debt.

Jesus Christ’s Spiritual Death Cancels Our Sin Debt

Our focus in this section is not on Jesus’ physical death, but His spiritual death. It is Jesus’ spiritual death that secured our so-great salvation. Having said this, we look closely to observe God’s ultimate transaction. We will use two illustrations to prepare ourselves for the actual cancellation of God’s decree against man: payment of a debt and cancellation of an official document.

Payment of a Debt

Example: You owed the government \$100,000 for back taxes. Let us also assume that you worked two, three, or even four jobs and finally paid it off. A week later, you received a paid receipt from your government agency: "This is to acknowledge that your debt of \$100,000 has been paid in full. Your account balance is zero." You praise God!

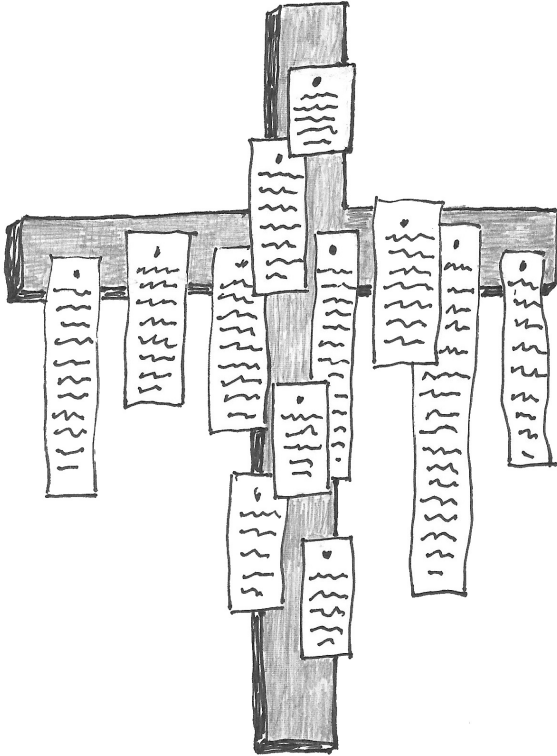
A year later, you receive another letter asking you to pay the same debt over again. How would you react? You would probably scream "What?" Why the surprise? Because your debt has already been paid in full.

No one can collect payment for the same debt twice. Agreed? This brings us to the second illustration.

Cancellation of an Official Document

Your national passport has been canceled. Can you ever use that passport again? No, you cannot! Once a passport carries the stamp "Canceled," it can never be used again. Ever! Now we are ready for scriptural truth.

Cancellation of God's Decree against Man



Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col. 2:14)

The word *decree* means “judgment” or “an opinion expressed with authority, a doctrine, or ordinance.”⁵⁴ In ancient times when an individual committed a crime, he was judged, and a decree (judgment or sentence) was written against him for his term of imprisonment. The decree carried his name, his crime, and the duration of his judgment. It was nailed to the doorpost of his cell. Once he served his sentence,

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

the jailer would take down the decree and the Greek word *tetelestai* would be written over it, meaning “paid in full”! Simultaneously, a judge declared him righteous or justified, and he was no longer subject to condemnation.⁵⁵

It is possible for a criminal to pay his dues to society. But what about a slave, who is demanded to pay a ransom for his freedom? He cannot. The Bible tells us, “We were slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:20). Everyone has a “certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us.” As in the criminal analogy, our debt must be paid before the justice of God can be satisfied and anyone can be freed from the slave market. Sadly, since a slave cannot possibly earn anything by way of work because of his status, man is put in an impossible position. That is bad news for us all.

Here is the good news: though man is unable to pay for his freedom, God put forth His Son, a free man, to make a full payment for the decrees against us. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

While Jesus Christ was on the cross, God took every sinner’s certificate of debt, nailed them to cross, and demanded full payment for each one. Herein is the beauty of the matchless grace of God.

The Most Awful Three Hours in History

The three hours that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, hung on the cross were the darkest hours in history. They are without equal. The time the angelic beings had been looking forward to was realized the moment the cross to which Jesus Christ was nailed was lifted up. This was the time the Old Testament saints had prophesied; the payment for every sin of the human race had finally arrived. God transferred our certificates of sins to His Son, Jesus Christ. “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24). “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21 RSV).

View Adam's sin as a grenade, our sins as fragments of it. On the cross, God tied the grenade of our sin to His Son and pulled the pin. Its explosion was like no other, fragments of our sins piercing through His body.

If you think the illustration is too extreme, consider Scripture's account. "He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him" (Isa. 53:3–5).

Stricken, smitten, afflicted, pierced, wounded, chastised, and crushed are synonymous words that the prophet Isaiah used to convey a message to us regarding the blows that God's Son received because He came in contact with our sins. Isaiah was graphic like no other: "the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief" (53:10).

Now we can link His excruciating pain to His screaming: "'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'"

The Reaction of Nature

To show that something extraordinary had occurred, God's creation reacted violently. The moment our Savior came in contact with our sins, there was total disarray in the land, showing God's abhorrence of sin. "Darkness fell over the whole land" (Mark 15:33); "the earth shook; and the rocks were split" (Matt. 27:51); "tombs were opened" (Matt. 27:52). When every payment was made, and He shouted, "It is finished," then "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matt. 27:51). This dramatic series of events was God's way of directing us to the importance of what had taken place on the cross.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Do you still have anything left in your backpack full of human works? Will you not stand in awe at the threshold of His grace and humbly say to God, “Thank You, Lord, for Your grace toward me”?

“Tetelestai” and the Finished Work of Christ

Tetelestai was the Greek word the Lord uttered on the cross. It means, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus Christ uttered the word upon God the Father’s receipt of His payment for every sin, ranging from the original sin of Adam to the sin of the last baby to be born in the future millennial reign of Jesus Christ. It is finished! The result: every certificate of sin now bears the mark of His blood. “It is finished.”

Walvoord and other scholars tell us, “Papyri receipts for taxes have been recovered with the word *Tetelestai* written across them, meaning ‘paid in full.’”⁵⁶ When the Lord used this word, He “meant His redemptive work was completed.”⁵⁷ “He had been made sin for people and had suffered the penalty of God’s justice which sin deserved.”⁵⁸ Based on the discoveries of archeology, we have a deeper appreciation of the word. It highlights why the Lord used it in the perfect tense. Once a bill is paid, it stands paid.

Quiz

Now, let us see if everyone is onboard. Let us see if we have grasped the teaching.

Question: When you pay your bill, do you get billed again for the same receipt?

Answer: No, you don’t receive the same bill again.

Question: Can a canceled passport be valid for travel, ever again?

Answer: No, it can’t.

Here is the *big* question: since our certificate has been canceled on the cross, can God use the certificate against us all over again?

Think carefully before you answer this question.

Question: We ask again, can God go back to the canceled certificate?

Answer: Emphatically, *no*!

He can't. Judicially, under the law of double jeopardy, one cannot judge the same offense twice, no matter how tempting.

It would be an insult and the worst kind of humiliation for Jesus Christ if God were to recall the judgment of the cross, where He crushed His Son as a substitute for our sins. It would be an offense to the Son to have someone dig up sins that have been buried for all eternity (Rom. 4:6–7). "*It is finished!*"

It Is Finished

Our certificates have been canceled once and for all.

- ✦ Sin will not be mentioned in the courtroom of heaven where believers will be evaluated for how they lived their spiritual lives. "So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Heb. 9:28).
- ✦ Unbelievers, good and bad, will be judged "according to their deeds" (Rev. 20:12). Their works will stack up against God's grace gift, faith alone in Christ alone, and their works will not come close to meeting the standard of the perfect holiness of God.
- ✦ This explains why our salvation is not based on the measure of our good deeds. He "saved us ... not according to our works, but

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (2 Tim. 1:9).

- ✦ This explains the passage, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28–29 NRSV).

The phrase "blasphemes against the Holy Spirit" is what theologians call "the unpardonable sin." It is rejection of the Holy Spirit making clear the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives. It is failure to accept, by faith alone, the finished work of Jesus Christ.

On the basis of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by rejection of Christ, the unbeliever will be cast into the lake of fire forever and ever. It is not a sin issue but a Son issue. "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" (Matt. 22:42).

- ✦ The cancellation of everyone's certificate of debt on the cross explains why cancellation of sins is applied for all—*unlimited atonement*. Cancellation does not mean automatic pardon; it simply means sin will no longer be the basis for judgment. All certificates have been canceled, made null and void. Rejection of Christ will be the sole basis for judgment (John 3:36).
- ✦ Because the certificate of debt has been canceled on the cross, we do not make sin the issue when we present the gospel. "Gospel" means good news. While we are indebted to tell others about the consequences of sin, we owe them the good news that Christ fully paid our sin debt on the cross.
- ✦ What about repentance? The word *repent* means a change of mind in the original language. It is used of both man and God. It means that man changes his mind and consequently trusts in Christ for salvation.

Having ironed out the truth regarding sin, condemnation, and payment, we can now study the third imputation, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to man.

The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Man

Observe the greatest transaction in history. God did it all. He took our sins and imputed them to His Son, Jesus Christ. "He made him to be sin ... on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21). This resulted in a full payment and consequent cancellation of all certificates of decrees against everyone. In exchange, by faith in Christ alone, God imputes to us the righteousness of His Son.

What a trade! What grace! "He made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21 NRSV). "But by His doing, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).



It is my heartfelt prayer that the truth taught so far will impact us for the praise of His glory. This I pray, in the name of our wonderful Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

SECTION II

Once man's relationship with God is restored,
it is imperative that the believer maintain fellowship.

Restoration is by grace.

Fellowship is by grace.

CHAPTER 8

Overview of Carnality

Much of our spiritual activity is nothing more than a cheap anesthetic to deaden the pain of an empty life — Lewis Sperry Chafer

In the close of section 1, we saw the great price our Savior paid for our salvation. No wonder the Bible refers to Him as the “indescribable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15). Because of His work, we trust in Him alone for our salvation. We are His, and the high price he paid for us makes us wish we would never again sin. But alas, we do. From the moment of salvation forward, the Christian may be spiritual or carnal. But God’s work of grace on man’s behalf remains unchanged by man’s behavior.

This biblical teaching has baffled a good number of teachers. Some reject the idea that a “truly born-again believer” can live immersed in sin. On the contrary: the apostle Peter rejected the idea that a person living in sin cannot be a true believer (2 Peter 2:22–21).

On the other hand many teachers are guilty of not balancing Scripture. They focus on God’s grace, but fail to consider His justice. Consequently, a good number of believers remain unchanged because they don’t fully understand grace. The apostle Paul balanced grace and justice. He vehemently defended grace, and he warned the apostate Corinthian church to “not receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1). The author of the book of Hebrews gives the same warning: “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15).

Review

In the last two chapters we examined the horror of the cross, what Christ went through to secure our “so great salvation” (Heb:2.3). We looked at sin and the justice of God. We saw that the spiritual death of God’s Son on the cross satisfied God’s justice.



In this section we will focus on four topics:

1. What is carnality?
2. Prolonged carnality
3. Consequences of prolonged carnality
4. Loss of rewards

What is Carnality?

Originally, the word *carnal* meant flesh, which refers to the body.⁵⁹ Carnality is a system of thoughts and actions diametrically opposed to God’s holiness. In other words, carnality is any unholy thought or action.

In light of the definition, one is carnal when one’s soul is controlled by the sin nature. We are carnal when we think or do anything contrary to God’s holiness. Keep in mind that in the spiritual life, there’s no neutrality. One is either 100 percent controlled by the influence of the Holy Spirit, or 100 percent controlled by the old sin nature. Ignorance is not an excuse. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5 NRSV). That is the line of demarcation.

The apostle Paul was honest about himself. He said, “I am carnal, sold

under sin" (Rom. 7:14 RSV). Let us face it: we too are carnal, sold under sin. That is not good news.

The good news is that, in regeneration, we are no longer slaves to sin. There are two classifications available in the spiritual life: spiritual and carnal. One is spiritual when his soul is filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, one is spiritual when he has no unconfessed sin in his soul. He becomes carnal when sin enters his soul.

One is spiritual when he has no unconfessed sin in his soul. He becomes carnal when sin enters his soul.

Every believer in Christ, mature or immature, moves back and forth between the carnal and the spiritual states. The mature or maturing believer spends more time in the spiritual state. He knows the importance of fellowship and so recovers quickly whenever his feet slip off the spiritual path. But the baby believer has not yet learned to overcome what the flesh offers and consequently spends more of his time and energy in carnality. "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1 RSV).

The apostle Paul gives this indictment: "For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? For when one says, 'I belong to Paul,' and another, 'I belong to Apollos,' are you not merely men?" (1 Cor. 3: 3-4 RSV). Backbiting, gossip, factions, and the like among God's children are symptoms of immaturity and characterize carnality. That was the condition of the Corinthian church. Sadly, a good number of Christians share the same classification today.

Prolonged Carnality

There is another level of spiritual maladjustment: prolonged carnality. The believer moves into carnality and fails to recover or move out. In the state of prolonged carnality, he is no longer mindful of, or worse, has altogether abandoned the path of spirituality.

Let there be no misunderstanding: a believer may be regularly attending church services, be involved in church activities, and still be in a state of prolonged carnality.

**Without realizing it, many have become numb to
God's Word.**

Regular attendance at Bible studies or prayer meetings does not always imply that one has a spiritual mindset. For many, going to church is only social, a place to see family and friends. Many of us go because we have become used to it. We don't even think about it; we just go. We take notes in Sunday school or during the sermon because we have become accustomed to doing so.

But there is a disconnect between our lifestyles and the accumulation of God's Word in our notebooks or hours logged in church. Truth has not transferred into our souls nor permeated our thoughts and actions. We hear it constantly, but it does not impact us.

Without realizing it, many have become numb to God's Word. Exposing ourselves to God's Word has become merely a habit or a ritual. If we have no spiritual light, we have nothing to shine for those in darkness (Matt. 5:14, 16). Sadly, our life is not "a fragrance of Christ" to those around us (2 Cor. 2:15). We are fleshly to the core. We look good on the outside, but are full of decay on the inside, like the whitewashed tombs of Matthew 23:7.

The Ephesians were a perfect example of believers in prolonged carnality. To them, the apostle Paul wrote, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light” (Eph. 5:14). The apostle’s letter was aimed at believers of a local church who were in prolonged carnality. It is interesting to note that the Lord spoke directly to the same church. “You have abandoned the love you had at first” (Rev. 2:4 NRSV). Both indictments were not for absenteeism from the assembly of the brethren, but for death of their spiritual lives and abandonment of the love for God. They regularly attended church services; it was their habit. But they attended spiritually asleep.

Consider: though their spiritual lives were asleep and they had abandoned the love they had for our Lord, they were still God’s children. That is *grace*. We should not miss this. Even though they were buried in darkness, they were still children of God. Because they were eternally God’s children, the apostle Paul could exhort, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.” We reiterate the apostle’s question: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!”

Consequences of Prolonged Carnality

The consequences of prolonged carnality are twofold: self-induced misery and divine discipline. The first we do to ourselves. We “sow the wind” of bad decisions and we “reap the whirlwind” of catastrophes and restlessness (Hos. 8:7). The second is what the justice of God does to us. “Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines” (Heb. 12:6). We have said it before, and it is fitting that we say it again: no believer who abuses God’s grace can escape God’s justice. A believer who is disrespectful and disobedient to God’s Word risks forfeiting superabundant blessing in both time and eternity. He orders for himself a package of self-induced pain and severe punishment from the court of eternal justice. Sooner or later, his order will arrive.

No believer who abuses God's grace can
escape God's justice.

Self-Induced Misery

Most of our suffering is self-made. When we abandon the spiritual life, we forgo the lamp that guides our feet and the light that shines on our path (Ps. 119:105). As a result, we stumble around in darkness, bumping our feet on every stone of bad decision. We also forfeit the fruit of God the Holy Spirit: true joy, peace, and love, just to name three (Gal. 5:22).

No believer can bear the pain of self-induced misery. We consult two believers of the Old Testament, to illustrate our point: King Saul and King David.

King Saul

King Saul was a believer in Yahweh. As a child of God, Saul had contact with the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 10:9–10). He began well, but along the way he had a spiritual relapse. He lost contact with God's Spirit (1 Sam. 16:14) as well as the joy of his salvation. Jealousy, bitterness, animosity, and rage marked his life.

Like many of us today, he was restless and miserable and frantically sought happiness. Music was the only thing that could calm him down. "Provide for me a man who can play well, and bring him to me" (1 Sam. 16:17). Question: what calms your soul? To the extent that something other than God's Word calms you down, it's more than likely that you are in prolonged carnality. Saul was not alone.

King David

Saul may not have ever grown up spiritually, but David did. He was a maturing or a mature believer long before he became king. We see it in the way he handled the giant Goliath. David met him with confidence in God, which showed his level of maturity (1 Sam. 17:45–47).

But things changed. Pride took up residence in his soul. David opted out from his normal duty and stayed home from war (2 Sam. 11:1). The rest is history. Pride led to lust, lust begot adultery, and adultery begot hypocrisy and murder. Self-induced misery was hatched; a miserable life was inevitable.

Because of his unconfessed sin, he experienced immeasurable inner pain. Here are some of his lamentations:

For my life is spent with sorrow And my years
with sighing; My strength has failed because of my
iniquity, And my body has wasted away. (Ps. 31:10)

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted
away Through my groaning all day long. (Ps. 32:3)

There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your
indignation; There is no health in my bones because
of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head;
As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My
wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly. I
am bent over and greatly bowed down; go mourning
all day long. For my loins are filled with burning, And
there is no soundness in my flesh. I am benumbed
and badly crushed; groan because of the agitation of
my heart. Lord, all my desire is before You; and my
sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs, my
strength fails me; And the light of my eyes, even that
has gone from me. (Ps. 38:3–10)

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Scripture tells us the law of harvest applies every time. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:7–8). God does not look the other way when we trample His grace underfoot. He will discipline us.

Divine Discipline

Discipline is an expression of grace. God uses it to draw us back on track for His abundant blessing. “He disciplines us for our good that we may share His holiness” (Heb. 12:10). Discipline is a sign that we belong to the royal family of God. It is only for God’s children. “God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (Heb. 12:7–8).

Discipline can be explained in three categories: first, a wake-up call; second, intensive discipline; and finally, dying discipline. “For this reason many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep” (1 Cor. 11:30).

**God does not look the other way when we trample
His grace underfoot. He will discipline us.**

A Wake-Up Call

In the first phase, God delivers a wake-up call by intensifying the pain of our self-induced suffering. David lamented, “For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer” (Ps. 32:4). God, in His infinite wisdom, will get our attention, whether through loss of employment, financial disaster, loss of health, or anything that will really make us stop and reevaluate our spiritual lives.

If we do not heed the warning, we will progress to the next stage

of discipline. “If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins” (Lev. 26:21).

Intensive Discipline

God promises to increase the plague on us if His wake-up call is ignored. This may include sickness or a combination of other plagues. Remember, discipline is for the children of God. Discipline assures the believer of his permanent position in Christ. It does not call for questioning one’s salvation.

If the believer continues to ignore the waves of suffering in his life, God eventually calls the believer home: “absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8 KJV).

Dying Discipline

“If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that” (1 John 5:16 NIV). Dissection of this passage is not within the scope of our work, but the message is well taken: “There is a sin that leads to death.” We cannot afford to ignore God’s warning to return to the spiritual life. The danger is that there comes a time when we, after much stiffening of our necks, get to a point of no return. God’s last recourse is to call us home.

A man who hardens his neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy. (Prov. 29:1)

The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened. (Prov 10:27)

A man who wanders from the way of understanding Will rest in the assembly of the dead. (Prov. 21:16)

King Saul is a perfect example of one who died the sin unto death. His trail of prolonged carnality proceeded unstopped until death caught up with him. God called him home early. He died a premature physical death. Time and again, God kept extending grace and long-suffering to him, until long-suffering was no more. "So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep ... He killed him" (1 Chron. 10:13–14).

Similarly, King David came close to death, but he recovered from prolonged carnality and got off the trail of death. He resorted to God's grace recovery procedure, which we will soon study. "For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:4–5).

Loss of Rewards

Loss of rewards does not mean loss of eternal salvation. Moses of the Old Testament was called home early and thereby forfeited the reward of entering Canaan because of his heinous sin against God (Num. 27:12–14). We know that Moses did not go to hell. He was in the company of the Lord at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:3).

The apostle Paul set the record straight. "If any man's work ... remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:14–15).

We should all be concerned about losing our rewards.

**Loss of rewards does not mean loss of eternal
salvation.**



It is my prayer that the truth will sink deep into our souls and cause us to take our spiritual lives seriously. This ends our discourse on prolonged carnality and opens another in chapter 9, salvation by grace.

CHAPTER 9

Salvation by Grace

Man cannot comprehend grace until he understands the impact of the cross.

Yes, our salvation from start to finish is a matter of the grace of God. “For by grace are you saved” (Eph. 2:8). It is God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that saves us. Ephesians 2:8, 9 goes on to say “... saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Clearly there is nothing we can do or contribute to our salvation.

Understanding this is the key to our salvation and all aspects of forgiveness.

The apostle Paul used the first six chapters of his letter to the Romans to lay the framework of justification by grace. He went on in chapter 8 to say, “Nothing can separate us from the Love of God.”

- ♦ In chapter 1, he emphasizes man’s responsibility in responding to God’s grace (Rom. 1:18–31).
- ♦ In chapter 2, he sets the pillars of the foundation of his work, “For God shows no partiality” (v. 11).
- ♦ In chapter 3, he clarifies by saying, “None is righteous, no, not one” (v. 10); “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23). What is more, he tell us that “justification is a gift” (v. 24).

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

- ✦ In chapter 4, Paul dismantles the idea of salvation by works. He uses Abraham as a perfect example of one who was eternally saved apart from works. He points out, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (v. 3). Further, he states, "One who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift, but as his due" (v. 5). Let us look closely at what Paul said. Can anyone work for a gift? No. Payment for work is a wage, not a gift. That is the apostle's point. Justification is a gift. Similarly, "the free gift of God is eternal life" (6:23). So works of any kind have no place in salvation. "He saved us not because of our deeds" (Titus 3:5).
- ✦ In chapter 5, the apostle affirms, "we are justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1). Then he speaks of sin and grace. He proclaims, "Law came in to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (v. 20). Read God's Word again: "but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Later, the apostle Paul adds emphatically, "You are not under law but under grace" (6:14).
- ✦ In chapter 6, knowing that many would react to his position on grace, he asks, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (vv. 1–2). Furthermore, he asks, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!" (v. 15).
- ✦ In chapter 7, he wrestles with his own sinfulness. "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good" (v. 21). Not for a moment would we doubt the apostle Paul's salvation even though he recounts, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin" (vv. 24–25).

- ✦ In chapter 8, he reviews this precious truth for himself and in the process gives us comfort and confidence that, once we are in Christ, we can rest assured in our salvation. “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 38–39).

We can be sure the apostle Paul was not promoting sin. In 2 Corinthians, he warns us “not to receive the grace of God in vain” (6:1).

“Once saved, always saved” is a biblical truth. It is not a license to live a life with no respect for God. Listen carefully: a life with no regard for God’s Word carries a warning from heaven.

Review

Chapters 5 through 7 formed the foundation for this chapter. There we looked at animal sacrifices, the horror of Christ’s death on the cross, sin and the justice of God. We saw that animal sacrifice was a type, the cross a reality. God did all the work.



Here, we will examine two related biblical teachings:

1. God’s integrity: Righteousness and justice in balance
2. Eternal security of the believer

By no means is this to be taken as a “license to sin.” As we have seen in chapter 8, there are grave consequences for prolonged carnality.

God's Integrity: Righteousness and Justice in Balance

Too many people devote all their time to the issue of God's love, with little or no time given to His justice. God is a God of justice. Justice is one half of His integrity; the other half is righteousness. They go hand in hand. If you remove one, God's integrity is incomplete. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne" (Ps. 89:14). Justice is the foundation upon which God expresses His love to the human race. Consider John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." God's love comes to us through the judgment of His Son.

No doubt grace influences God's actions. He expresses His actions in love. Justice keeps everything in balance. Think of it: it was God's justice that crushed His Son on the cross (Isa. 53:10). Justice means that sin does not go unpunished (Ex. 34:7; Prov. 11:21). Long suffering does not negate justice. It will be carried out in God's perfect time.

"For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves" (Heb. 12:6 RSV). His justice demands that He punish severely His children, who constantly violate the authority of His Word. Just because God has not yet dealt with the carnal believer does not mean the carnal believer will not receive punishment.

Grace is extended for a time, then punishment. "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

This brings us to the subject of the eternal security of the believer.

Eternal Security of the Believer

Premise: Man's salvation *does not* depend on morality or good works. "He saved us not according to our works" (Titus 3:5). God does not save us because we are good; no matter how good that good might be, we are never good enough. Agreed?

Conclusion: Immorality or bad works cannot undo "so great a salvation" (Heb. 2:3). To argue otherwise is to be illogical. Salvation is not the result of a change of lifestyle. We are not required to change our behavior before coming to Christ; we bring our sins with us to the cross. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 RSV).

Salvation is entirely the work of God. His promises are unchangeable.

Know that whatever God does endures forever.
(Eccl. 3:14)

My salvation will be forever. (Isa. 51:8)

I give them eternal life; they shall never perish. (John 10:28)

We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb. 10:10)

I am convinced that [nothing] ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:37–39)

These verses and more are explored in my booklet, *Eternal Security of the Believer*.⁶⁰

Remember: assurance of one's salvation is not a license to live in carnality. The price a believer pays for living in carnality is too costly. The penalty is loss of rewards and premature death. Moreover, the price our Lord had to pay for our salvation was too dear.

CHAPTER 10

Grace: The Foundation for Restoring Fellowship

But if by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.
(Rom. 11:6)

We are coming close to the completion of our tapestry of *Forgiveness by Confession Alone*. In the upcoming chapters, we will be weaving in the final threads: confession (the centerpiece of our work), hindrances to restoration of fellowship, repentance, importance of staying in fellowship, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and the thread of final thoughts.

Let us strive to concentrate under the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit as we complete the final phase of our study. I pray that understanding God's grace in restoring fellowship will be a blessing to you and empower your spiritual life.

Review

So far, we have interwoven the threads of the holiness of God, the panoramic view of fellowship, man's broken fellowship, God's grace in the restoration of man, animal sacrifices, the horror of the cross, sin and the justice of God, and the thread of the consequences of prolonged carnality. In all this, Christ's final words on the cross are worthy of recall: "It is finished!"

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Songwriter Horatio G. Spafford, in his work “It Is Well with My Soul,” echoes our Lord’s words in the third stanza:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought,

My sin, not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more,

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul.



This chapter is not about salvation as such. Our purpose is to highlight grace in salvation. This will help us to understand grace in restoration. Therefore we will firm up our foundation of salvation by grace before we proceed to the next chapter on confession.

To firmly ground ourselves in grace, we will examine the following:

1. Sin is no longer the issue in salvation
2. The danger of mixing our own ideas with Scripture
3. Jesus Christ, God’s greatest gift

Our salvation is a gift through Jesus Christ, “for the gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23). Similarly, our restoration to fellowship is a gift through Christ. No work, no agonizing are required before a carnal believer can be restored. The only requirement is that the sinning believer confesses his sin before God. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). God restores man to fellowship upon confession of his sin. This is grace in action.

Some may take issue with teachings on grace because of their limited understanding of the ultimate transaction, which took place at the cross. Our debt has been canceled “once for all” (1 Peter 3:18). Remember that, under the law of double jeopardy, one cannot judge the same offense twice. God can never, ever recall the sins that were

judged at the cross and rejudge them a second time because “as far as the east is from west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12 RSV). Can the opposing points of east and west ever meet? No, it is not possible.

Sin Is No Longer the Issue in Salvation

That sin is no longer the issue in salvation does not mean that our personal sins have no ramifications. They do. God punishes them in time, but never in the eternal state (Heb. 9:28). Based on the cancellation of our debt, sin is no longer the issue in salvation. The question in salvation is what does one think of Christ, the One whose payment satisfied God’s justice? Read the Scripture carefully. Wherever eternal salvation is the issue, Christ is always the focal point, not sin.

Louis Sperry Chafer, in his *Systematic Theology*, put it this way:

[T]he question here is whether the sacrifice of Christ is the only divine instrumentality whereby God *actually* saves the elect, or whether that sacrifice is a divine work, finished indeed, with regard to its scope and purpose, which renders all men *saveable*, but one applied in sovereign grace by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit only when the individual believes. Certainly Christ’s death of itself forgives no sinner, nor does it render unnecessary the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹

Nicodemus

Look at the story of Nicodemus, a very religious man, who came to Christ. Jesus never made Nicodemus’s sin an issue. Rather, Jesus made Himself the issue: “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

Cornelius

When the apostle Peter went to Cornelius’s house, he simply presented Christ to him and his household: “‘To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’ While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:43–44 RSV).

Jailer

On another occasion, the apostle Paul was in jail. The jailer came to him with a question of life and death: “what must I do to be saved”? (Acts 16:30). What do you tell people when they ask you a similar question? The apostle wasted no time. He gave him the only biblical answer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (v. 31). That is the answer we owe anyone about eternal life.

On the other hand, we muddy the water of truth when we tell people to give up this and that and then come to Christ. If we can help ourselves, what is the need of going to Christ? On the contrary, Jesus Christ says, “Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Therein is the gospel (good news)!

The Danger of Mixing Our Own Ideas with Scripture

People often follow traditions that reflect their own ideas and have no basis in Scripture. We must resist the temptation to add to Scripture. Let us stand on the side of the truth. On close examination, traditions are man-made theologies. We will look at only a few.

Confessing Sins for Salvation

People are often told to repent of their sins or to confess their sins for salvation. There is a place for repentance in salvation, but it has nothing to do with sin. The word *repent* simply means “a change of mind.” Our Lord used it: “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). This means, “Change your mind and believe the good news.” The Jews rejected Christ, so He appealed to them to change their minds and trust Him as their Savior. Confession of one’s sins is a privilege that belongs to God’s children alone (1 John 1:9). Unbelievers do not confess their sins to be saved; they simply trust or believe in Jesus Christ alone.

Inviting Christ into Your Heart

We often hear the call “to invite Christ into your heart” or something similar. This again is man-made theology. The Bible tells us that man’s heart is “desperately corrupt” (Jer. 17:9 RSV). The Lord indwells our bodies, not our hearts. Upon faith in Christ, the new believer’s body becomes a temple for the Holy Spirit to indwell. “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Cor. 3:16). Christ has invited us, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). It is not our place to violate heavenly protocol and invite Christ anywhere.

Many make the costly mistake of asking unbelievers to open their hearts and invite Christ in. This error stems from misinterpretation of Revelation 3:20, “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

This passage is loaded with metaphors. In context, the Lord was speaking to believers of a lukewarm church (Rev. 3:14–18). He was not addressing the unsaved. Also, the word *knock* in verse 20 is a metaphor for warning discipline: “Those whom I love, I reprove and

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

chasten; so be zealous and repent” (v. 19). Thus, “If any one hears my voice [of warning discipline] and opens the door [change the course of his spiritual life], I will come in and eat with him, and he with me [restoration of fellowship]” (v. 20).

Jesus Christ, God’s Greatest Gift

We consult Romans 8:32 to hammer home the truth of grace: “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

Many of us have read the passage several times, and may not have scrutinized the words properly. Understanding this passage is critical to our understanding of confession in the next chapter.

As previously noted, the phrase “freely give” underscores grace. God’s best, His Son, was a gift to us. It follows logically that God’s minor blessings would also flow to us because of His grace gift. We will explain using a table.

Roman 8:32—Table

Column A: God’s Greatest Gift	Column B: God’s Minor Gifts
Jesus Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salvation• Restoration to fellowship• Promotion• Financial blessing• A prudent wife/husband• Good Health• Etc.

Look closely at the table in the context of Romans 8:32. Jesus Christ is God’s greatest gift. The apostle Paul calls Jesus Christ “the inexpressible gift” (2 Cor. 9:15 RSV). No words can describe such a Gift.

Let us compare the two columns.

Question: Between column A and B, which one is greater?

Answer: Column A.

Question: What did man do to receive column A?

Answer: Nothing; man does nothing to receive a gift.

If God has given us His very best when we didn't do anything—and He has—then what can we do to earn anything else, all of lesser value (column B)?

If we agree that we can do nothing, why then do we act as if our blessing in time depends on what we do? The sublime truth is that God's blessing, including restoration to fellowship, depends on who and what He is, and not on who and what we are. Every blessing that comes our way does so through His Son. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over [gave Him up] for us all [when we didn't do a thing], how will He not also with [through] Him freely give us all things?"

The payment for our sins that took place at the cross was the sole basis for man's contact with God. This is grace: unearned, unmerited favor. More completely, Christ's work on the cross satisfied God's justice, which quelled His wrath, thereby making it possible for God to shower His limitless love upon undeserving man. Everything that God does for man comes to him through God's matchless grace. We said it before; we will say it again: man cannot understand grace without first understanding the impact of the cross.

Fellowship with God is part of God's grace blessing for the believer in time. Confession is God's grace procedure to maintain fellowship and is the topic of our next chapter.

CHAPTER 11

Overview of Confession

I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.
(Ps. 32:5)

We have arrived at the heart of our study. This section holds the key that unlocks the spiritual life. Therefore it is of paramount importance that we approach the chapter with our undivided attention. Confession and restoration to fellowship lubricate the engines of our spiritual lives.

The prerequisite for spiritual productivity is *consistent confession of sins* when one is aware of them.

Review

Previously we have seen that grace is the basis for restoration to fellowship. It is clear that God did the most for us as a gift; He gave us His Son (Rom 8:32). The conclusion was that God will do everything for us on the basis of the cross. We cannot merit anything from God.



Let us depend solely on the mentorship of God the Holy Spirit as we carefully examine the following:

1. Defining the word *confess*

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

2. Confession and the Mosaic law
3. Confession in the church age
4. Uniqueness of church age confession
5. Spirituality is absolute
6. Examining the New Testament restoration passage
7. Continued cleansing of the blood of Christ
8. No ritual in confession

Defining the Word *Confess*

Words and passages of Scripture must be properly translated and accurately interpreted. Many passages of God's Word are straightforward. They do not require scholars or knowledge of Greek and Hebrew to be understood. Consider John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (RSV). This is clear. To receive God's life, eternal life, one must trust in the Person of Jesus Christ alone. It is that simple!

Similarly, there's no ambiguity in a criminal's confession of guilt. A prosecutor or a judge takes one's confession of a crime to mean that he agrees with his indictment. The offender's demeanor is not a factor in his confession. He may have confessed with tears running down his cheeks or with a big smile on his face. The bottom line is his admission.

"Confess" simply means to admit or acknowledge.

It is perfectly normal, for a person who is healthy psychologically and spiritually, to have a sense of guilt if one is guilty. But the feeling of guilt is not the basis of forgiveness. Does that mean we can confess

our sins with a smile? You could, but confession with a smile reveals one's level of spiritual growth—zero. Nevertheless, a smile on one's face cannot revise God's promise: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). No believer who understands the horror of sin and the price Christ paid for it could view his personal sin lightly, and there are no biblical examples to support this idea.

Defining the Word "Confess" from the Greek

The Greek verb *homologeō* is translated "confess" in our English Bible. Debates are ongoing regarding its interpretation. Taking part in that debate is beyond the scope of our work. I need only point out one thing: we must be extremely careful not to add to God's Word, no matter how tempting. According to scholars, *homologeō* means "to confess, admit, agree, acknowledge."⁶² It is also said to mean "to assent, accord, agree with ... to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, result of inward conviction."⁶³ This "inward conviction" means to internally recognize your sin and guilt and admit or acknowledge it.

None of these definitions include feeling sorry or remorseful. Whatever meaning we assign to the word *confess* would need to work in other verses where this word is found. Keep in mind our Lord also used the word this way: "everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of man shall confess him also before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8). Think about this. If "confess" meant "to feel sorry," then Christ would feel sorry for the believer when He confesses him before His angels. Similarly, if it meant "to be remorseful," then Christ would experience some kind of remorse when He acknowledges the believer receiving rewards "before the angels of God."

The Greek word has no connotation of feeling sorry or having remorse, a meaning many people have given it. "Confess" simply means to admit or acknowledge a fact. If we reread Luke 12:8 with

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

this in mind, it will now correctly read that Christ will acknowledge a believer receiving rewards in a special way before His angels. That is something to look forward to.

Confession, therefore, is one's acknowledgement or admission of an inward conviction of truth. Here is an example from the Bible.

David committed adultery and murder. Nathan, the prophet, confronted him. "Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon" (2 Sam, 12:9). The charges were stacked high!

Knowing the truth within himself "David said, 'I have sinned against the LORD'" (2 Sam. 12:13). Another way of saying it is this: "Lord, I have committed adultery and murder." This is confession.

Consider the simplicity. David clearly acknowledged his sins as read to him by Nathan, and agreed with God's indictment. He was grieved no doubt; but that was not the basis for his forgiveness. The grounds were grace. It is normal, in fact it is in our nature, to have a sense of grief when we have wronged someone. However, God does not forgive us because we feel sorry or weep for our sins. He forgives us because His Son, Jesus Christ, made full payment for our sins on the cross.

**He forgives us because His Son, Jesus Christ, made
full payment for our sins on the cross.**

The idea that one can do some kind of penance, or say that he is sorry and promise God never to commit that offense again in order to gain forgiveness, is simply wrong. There is no begging, weeping, or beating of the chest for forgiveness. David did not pay any penance. He simply internally consented, agreed, or admitted that what Nathan said was true. His acknowledgment was to God. What was the outcome?

“Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die’” (2 Sam. 12:13).

Defining the Word Confess from the Hebrew

The Greek word *homologeō* means “to confess,” “to acknowledge,” or “to admit.” This could refer to acknowledgment of one’s work before others, as Christ will do when believers are evaluated (Luke 12:8). It could also refer to one acknowledgment of guilt, as David did, “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, I ‘will confess my transgressions to the LORD’” (Ps. 32:5).

It is amazing what an understanding of a word in its original usage can do for an interpretation of a passage. Consider David’s use of two important Hebrew words in this passage. He used both *yada* and *yadah*, which have slightly different meanings.

Yada

“I acknowledged my sin to Thee.” The word *acknowledged* is the Hebrew word *yada*. It means “to be acquainted with.”⁶⁴ This is significant. One cannot confess or admit what one does not know. So the first step in confession is knowledge of one’s sins: “For I know [*yada* = I am aware of] my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me” (Ps. 51:3). This implies that David did some soul searching to list his sinful acts against God. “O LORD, You have searched me” (Ps. 139:1).

God told His people, “when ... [one] becomes guilty ... he shall confess that in which he has sinned” (Lev. 5:5). So we must list our known sins in our souls. This is not a generic confession, such as, “God forgive me all my sins.” That is not only vague, it is also unbiblical. The requirement in the Old Testament, even for national sins, was the same.

Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness. (Lev. 16:21–22)

Yadah

Having inventoried his soul and identified the sins he committed, David employed a different Hebrew word, *yadah*. *Yadah* is similar to *yada*, but with a slightly different meaning. It means “to speak out,” “to confess” or “acknowledgment of sin.”⁶⁵ Having all his sins identified in his soul, David acknowledged those sins before God. “I will confess [*yadah* = make known, acknowledge, confess] my transgressions to the LORD” He simply followed God’s instruction for restoration to fellowship.

Stop. Adhere to His instruction. Resist adding to God’s Word. Sentimentality plays no part in God’s faithfulness to forgive sins once they are confessed.

How can God forgive such despicable acts? In one word, *grace*. There is no sin greater than the grace of God. Understanding God’s grace will cause us to deflate our self-righteousness.

We will explore David’s confession in detail as our study progresses. If we keep David’s example in our mind, understanding the basic principle of confession will not be difficult.

* * *

Old Testament confession looks forward to the cross, while New Testament confession looks back to the cross. New Testament

confession is grounded in and informed by Old Testament confession. With this in mind, we will examine both.

Bear in mind that God's holiness cannot and will not associate with any unholy object, animate or inanimate. God knows that even the best of men will continue to falter after salvation. "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins" (Eccl. 7:20). "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin'"? (Prov. 20:9). God implemented a grace recovery procedure whereby man in his sinful state could be restored to fellowship.

Confession and the Mosaic Law

Through Moses, God gave instructions to Israel, His children, for the procedure to recover fellowship. "When a man is guilty ... he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord for the sin which he has committed ... a lamb or a goat for a sin offering; and the priest shall atone for him for his sin" (Lev. 5:5–6 RSV).

In God's instruction, there was no command to be remorseful, feel sorry, or agonize for one's sin. Does this mean that God does not take our sins seriously? Of course not! He takes sin seriously, and His justice will deal squarely with the sinning believer at the proper time. Weeping and wailing cannot defer or mitigate the justice of God.

In the interpretation of Scripture, we must not add to what God has said, no matter how tempting (Prov. 30:6). Humanizing God distorts the interpretation of His Word. Just because we feel sorry for someone who is remorseful for his sin does not mean God shares our feelings. Remember, "God is not a man" (Num. 23:19). He is not sentimental. The sinner was to follow God's instruction: "confess the sin ... bring his guilt offering ... a lamb or a goat for a sin offering." God's priest would do the rest. That is grace!

Adhering to God's Instruction in Confession

God's servants of the Old Testament were to carefully follow God's instructions when they were caught up in sin. They were to tell God, in their own words, that what they did was wrong. God already knew everything. David declared, "Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely" (Ps. 139:4 NRSV). God wants us to admit our wrongdoing before Him.

The process is quite intriguing. The sinner confesses his sins and brings an offering to the priest. The priest lays his hand on the offering and slays it before the Lord. Or, in the case of the scapegoat, he sends the goat away into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21). The goat in that case bears the sins of the offerer far away, "as far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12).

Remember, these sacrificial offerings were a type of Jesus Christ.

Confession Is Available for All

God wants to share fellowship with everyone who desires it. His grace recovery procedure policy covers everyone. There was even provision for the poor so that their sins could equally be atoned for. "But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD ... two turtledoves or two pigeons ... he shall bring them to the priest" (Lev. 5:7-8). What if he was too poor for turtledoves and pigeons? Grace has an answer: "But if his means are insufficient for two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then for his offering ... he shall bring the tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering ... he shall bring it to the priest" (Lev. 5: 11). Think of it: God asked the poor to bring the little they could afford for a sacrifice because He desires fellowship with everyone.

Old Testament Intermediaries between God and Man

One of the duties of the Old Testament priest was to atone for the sins of the people. God ordained them as intermediaries between Himself and man. Consequently, confession was accomplished through these servants of God. "When a man is guilty ... he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord for the sin which he has committed ... a lamb or a goat for a sin offering; and the priest shall atone for him for his sin" (Lev. 5:5–6). "The priest shall make atonement for them and they shall be forgiven" (Lev. 4:20).

The primary function of priests in the Old Testament was tied to the ritual of animal sacrifice. They represented man before God in atonement. They were "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5). When Christ, the "High Priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1) came, He not only "offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27) as a sacrifice, He brought the Old Testament ritual to an end.

Confession in the Church Age

Jesus Christ was the final sacrifice that paid for the sins of the entire world, once for all. Therefore animal sacrifice came to a halt. But God implemented a grace recovery procedure whereby man in his sinful state can be restored to fellowship. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Both sins of cognizance and sins of ignorance rupture one's fellowship. Obviously man cannot confess what he does not know to be sin. God's grace takes care of the unknown sin, when one confesses the sins he knows. "If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [*unknown* sins]."

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

We are to set aside sentimentality, as did God's servants of the Old Testament, and carefully follow God's instructions.

Christ's shout on the cross, "*Tetelestai*," (it is finished) signified two important changes:

- the penalty for man's sins has been paid in full, and
- a change was made in the priesthood.

We have touched on the first subject, Christ's payment for man's sin once and for all. Let us consider the implementation of a universal priesthood. The priesthood of the Mosaic law has changed. Each believer is now a priest before God, allowing him to confess his sin directly to God. "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also ... For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God" (Heb. 7:12–19).

A Change in Priesthood

Hebrews 7:12 confirms that a change in priesthood has occurred. Jesus Christ shouted, "It is finished!" Having offered the once-for-all sacrifice, He sat down at the right hand of the Father. "Through His own blood He entered the holy place once for all" (Heb. 9:12), where He functions as our Great High Priest.

The apostle John says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). In other words, Jesus Christ, our High Priest, is ever ready to do the same duty as did the priests of the Old Testament.

Now the main point in what has been said is this:
we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat

at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises ...When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Heb. 8:1–6, 13)

Yes, the Old Testament system of confession through the priests is obsolete and has disappeared. After the cross, confession is made to God the Father alone, through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. "For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." Also, our Lord "has become the guarantee of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22). He "holds his priesthood permanently ... He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:24–25).

Universal Priesthood of Believers in Christ

A change in the system of the Old Testament order of priesthood warrants “setting aside of a former commandment,” including the ritual mandate of a specialized priesthood and confession of sin through them. God instituted a new order of priesthood, the priesthood of believers in Christ.

It is amazing! Not only are believers in Christ “called ... saints” (Rom. 1:7), they are “living stones ... a spiritual house ... a chosen race, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Every believer in Christ, male or female, is a priest. This has never before happened in history. What a huge significance!

Uniqueness of Church Age Confession

Recall in the Old Testament, only the Levite priests were allowed to “perform the service of the tent of the meeting” (Num. 18:23). They were the only ones who could enter into God’s presence. They alone were set apart or sanctified to atone for Israel’s sins. They alone could enter the holy place.

When our Savior entered the real holy place with His own blood, something important happened: “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51). This means that viewing and entering the holy place is no longer exclusively for the Levitical priesthood, but is for every believer in Christ. Because we no longer have a specialized priesthood, everyone may confess their sins directly to God. Every believer can approach His throne (Heb. 4:16). What a privilege and an honor!

Every church age believer now has the privilege the Old Testament priests had! We no longer need an intermediary to approach God. Our priesthood commission allows us to confess our sins *directly* to God, as did the priests of the Old Testament. No one assisted them

in the confession of their sins; they took care of those themselves. The invitation “let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16) is for every believer in Christ. It boils down to this: since every person is a priest, each can represent himself. The concept of a specialized priesthood representing him has come and gone.

The church is a unique entity with a unique program. No believer was ever indwelt by God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit until the time of the church. There was nothing like the universal priesthood until the cross. Today, every believer in Christ is a priest with the full rights to represent himself before God, “Let us [all believer priests] draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.” That is a change in God’s program.

Spirituality Is Absolute

Earlier we touched on the issue of spirituality. We noted that there is no neutrality in the spiritual life. One is 100 percent controlled by the Holy Spirit and advancing or 100 percent controlled by the old sin nature (carnal or fleshly) and falling behind. One is spiritual when he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, where one’s thoughts and actions are subjected to the Spirit’s control. On the other hand, one is carnal when he loses the filling and the influential power of the Holy Spirit; he ceases to “please God” (Rom. 8:8).

Every work that we do outside of the filling of the Spirit, whether it be evangelism, giving, intercessory prayer, helping the needy and more, will be classified as wood, hay, and straw. Such work, no matter how genuine, will be burned up when Christ returns (1 Cor. 3:13–15). In light of this, we must be diligent to stay in fellowship, where the Holy Spirit’s power, wisdom, discernment and much more are ours in abundance.

Examining the New Testament Restoration Passage

“If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [unknown sins]” (1 John 1:9).

Context is everything in the interpretation of Scripture. Many have read this passage and failed to interpret it within its context of who was being addressed. To gain insight, let us look at two kinds of believers: advancing and regressing.

The Advancing Believer

“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

The advancing believer is one who consistently feeds on God’s Word and delights in manifesting the life of Christ. He is growing “in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). In context, John’s epistle points to believers spiritually on course, or in the light.

There is no question that the advancing believer was in David’s mind when he composed his first psalm: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers” (Ps. 1:1–3).

To help the spiritual minded believer stay on course, the apostle wrote, “If we [John and the advancing believers] confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [unknown sins].” The apostle shares the invaluable lesson of the staying power of fellowship with God through consistent confession and watchfulness of one’s spiritual life. He correctly identifies that “indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1John 1:3). He goes on to enlighten us regarding God’s holiness. “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:5–6).

God is light. He is absolute holiness. Those on spiritual course will continue to share in His light. “If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5–7).

The Regressing Believer

The regressing believer is one who *consistently* lives in sin. He has little or no regard for God’s Word. He may be in church, but he’s not really a part of the church. He may join others in worship, but his “heart is far away from” God (Mark 7:6). There is little, if anything, in his conversation, actions, or lifestyle that can point one to Christ. Though a believer in this state is required to use 1 John 1:9; we saw that, contextually, John’s epistle was written for the advancing believer.

Does that mean that a believer in prolonged carnality cannot use 1 John 1:9? Far from it! 1 John 1:9 is a recovery procedure *for every believer in Christ*, advancing or regressing. When the regressing believer confesses or admits his sins, they are instantly forgiven. He must then change course to make spiritual progress. Zane Hodges states, “Unless a Christian really knows how to have fellowship with God, he or she will be an easy target for Satan’s efforts to undermine believers’ harmony with the Father and the Son.”⁶⁶

The Continued Cleansing of the Blood of Christ

God is genius. He knows that we are trapped in our sin nature and understands the implications thereof. The apostle Paul expressed our daily struggle with sin. Unlike those who claim sinless perfection, he was honest. "I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me" (Rom. 7:19). He correctly identified his own struggle.

Here is where the good news gets even better. Believers who "walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light" need to take comfort in the marvelous work of God's grace.

Here is how the cleansing of the blood of Christ works. When we walk in the light, living our lives in light of God's holiness, and we inadvertently sin, His light exposes the darkness in us. Right away, we admit to Holy God that what His light exposes in us is true. "Father, I have committed this or that sinful act." On the spot, we are forgiven "and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). How good can God's grace get?

The believer who denies the Holy Spirit's exposure of his sin has denied the truth of God's Word. "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Self-deception marks him. We all sin.

But a regressing believer sins habitually, walks in darkness, breathes the air of darkness, and enjoys living in sin. An advancing, growing believer sins less frequently, enjoys walking in the light, and enjoys his rapport and fellowship "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." When the advancing believer falters, he admits his sin to the Father.

The believer is required to acknowledge, admit, or confess his sins.

This means he is not to hide any of his sins. Some argue, “One can isolate one’s sins, acknowledge a couple, deliberately forgo the rest, and still be forgiven.” That is in violation of Scripture. There is no biblical ground for such a position. It is grace abused at best; at worst, it is open rebellion against God. First John 1:9 begins with the premise, “if we confess our sins.” The Greek word *hamartia*, meaning sin, is plural. This implies all known sins. Actually, the phrase in the original Greek literally says, “If we keep confessing our sins.”⁶⁷

Scripture cautions, “He who conceals his transgression will not prosper” (Prov. 28:13). In other words, the believer is not coming completely clean before Holy God. He knows his sins and refuses to acknowledge all of them, meaning he is lying to the Holy Spirit; he is refusing to agree with the light the Holy Spirit is shining on his sins. That, in itself, is another sin. God evaluates our innermost thoughts and mental attitudes, not just our words.

If we come clean and acknowledge our sins, God made a promise which He cannot ignore: to forgive us our known sins and to cleanse us from all unknown sins. “The Greek text says that God effectively forgives and purifies once and for all.”⁶⁸ Kistemaker underscores this point: “The first verb *to forgive* describes the act of canceling a debt and the restoration of the debtor. And the second verb *to cleanse* refers to making the sinner holy so that he is able to have fellowship with God.”⁶⁹ God’s promise to do all these things is based on His faithfulness. He cannot go back on His promise. Again, “The only condition required for forgiveness is that we confess our sins.”⁷⁰ This brings up an important issue: how does one confess his sins?

No Ritual in Confession

The word *confession*, translated from the Hebrew word *yadah* and the Greek word *homologeō*, means the same: to acknowledge or admit. If

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

and when a believer becomes aware of his sin, he is to acknowledge or confess it before God. It should be a constant practice.

God promises to forgive. "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins." God's faithfulness stems from the cross. That is grace. Is 1 John 1:9 a gateway to sin city? God forbid! Anyone who pilots the ship of 1 John 1:9 toward the Island of Sin City risks capsizing en route to his destination.

CHAPTER 12

What about Repentance?

Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be
zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

The role of repentance, either in salvation or in the restoration to fellowship, has for centuries drawn much debate. Some churches practice an altar call. They invite sinners to come forward and encourage them to weep and wail for the forgiveness of their sins. Others instituted a system of “penance as penitential acts ... [an] opportunity to show God the seriousness of ... [one’s] repentance.”⁷¹ The list of different views can go on and on.

Some claim to understand grace, but their teachings and actions reveal the opposite. If one believes that grace is *unmerited favor*, he will not ask anyone to appease God, either for salvation or for restoration to fellowship. God was *fully* satisfied with the work of His Son. He requires nothing else! Remember, one cannot understand grace without first understanding the impact of the cross.

Just as the word *confess* is applied to the Lord, likewise, repentance is also attributed to God: “He repented that he had made man on the earth” (Gen. 6:6 Wycliffe). Whatever meaning we assign to the word *repent*, it must also fit when it is used of God. If we hold that repent means “to turn away from sin,” then how does it fit into Genesis 6:6?

Review

Let us take an inventory of our work. In the last chapter we scrutinized the overview of confession. We examined the issue of confession both in the Old and the New Testaments. No work, no penance was needed in confession. Acknowledging or admitting one's sin, to God, restores one to fellowship.



Now, we will examine these four topics:

1. Repentance defined
2. Repentance in relation to God
3. Relationship between repentance and salvation
4. Repentance in restoration

Repentance Defined

The Greek verb *metanoeo* is correctly rendered “repentance” in most English Bibles. It literally means “to think differently about something or to have a change of mind.”⁷² In the New Testament, it almost always signifies “a change for the better, an amendment. The exception is in Luke 17:3–4 where the connotation is repentance from sin.”⁷³ Whatever the case, repentance in its most basic sense means a change of mind.

Repentance in Relation to God

Scripture is emphatic, “For I, the LORD, do not change” (Mal. 3:6). The passage stresses God’s immutability. But a few passages may seem to contradict Malachi. We have already noted Genesis 6:6. In Exodus 32:14, “the LORD changed His mind about the harm which

He said He would do to His people.” Keep in mind that God’s attributes are unchangeable. Moses simply assigned to God a word that characterizes man’s nature in order to explain God’s policy. This literary device is commonly known as an anthropomorphism.

God’s character does not change, but God “does change in his actions ... when given proper grounds for doing so, and thereby does not change in his basic integrity or character.”⁷⁴

Essentially, it is the justice of God that adjusts to man. There are three grounds on which God’s justice adjusts to people. 1) intercession (Amos 7:1–6); 2) people’s repentance (Jer 18:3–11; Jonah 3:9–10); and 3) compassion (Deut 32:36; Judg 2:18; 2 Sam 24:16).⁷⁵

Vine stated it this way: “the aspect of His mind is changed toward an object that has itself changed.”⁷⁶ So when the word *repentance* is applied to God, it is to show us how God’s policy operates. He is loving and kind. When man pilots his course contrary to God’s way, God’s justice disciplines him, but when man corrects his course, God repents (changes His mind) and divine discipline is removed. God’s justice adjusts. That is *grace*!

Relation Between Repentance and Salvation

Recall our study in chapter 7. We noted that the sin barrier between man and God has been removed through the cancellation of man’s certificate of debt by Jesus Christ (Col. 2:14). Therefore the issue in salvation is what we think of Jesus Christ, the One who paid our debt. Think of it. Christ never mentioned the word *sin* in the salvation passage of John 3:1–15. In the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, the Lord made the issue clear: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.” (John 3:14–15). Faith in Christ alone was His emphasis.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

How can we explain repentance as used in passages that deal with salvation? The answer is simple. Given that the meaning of repentance is “a change of mind,” we will examine two passages.

Mark 1:15

The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.

Let us pay attention to two words our Lord uses, “repent” and “believe.” Repentance is a call for man to stop and change his mind about accepting God’s grace offer of salvation. Answering this call leads to accepting God’s greatest gift to man, His Son, Jesus Christ, *by faith alone*.

A believer who trusts in Christ for his salvation changes his mind regarding God’s offer and believes in Christ. Before salvation, we were en route to eternal condemnation, but changing our mind about Christ leads to eternal life. That is what repentance is all about. Repent does not mean to turn from sin. Therefore we err when we ask people to “repent of their sins” as part of the requirement for salvation. The Bible does not teach the idea of confessing sin for salvation but rather changing one’s mind about Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:20–21

I did not shrink from declaring to you ... solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider how Luke used the two terms “repentance” and “faith.” Why is repentance toward God? Because it is God who offers salvation to man. Our faith in Christ signifies that we have accepted His offer. We change our mind.

We have seen the application of repentance to the unbeliever; now we will look at the application of repentance for the regressing believer.

Role of Repentance in Restoration to Fellowship

Confession is the *only* means for a believer to restore fellowship with a holy God. His forgiveness is *always* on the basis of the Christ's perfect work on the cross, and nothing else. God is always mindful of the horror of the cross, where He *crushed* His Son as a substitute for our sins. The idea that forgiveness is based on the work of man's feelings, penance, or remorse is not only unbiblical, it shifts the focus from God to man, ignoring the perfect work of our Savior.

We are saved because we place our faith alone in Christ alone, not because we repent of our sins. Likewise, in restoration to fellowship, we are forgiven because we admit our sins before a holy God, not because we promise never to commit this or that sin again. If we acknowledge our sins to God, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our known sins.

Is there any role for repentance in the restoration to fellowship? First, we note that nowhere in Scripture is the word *repentance* attributed to an advancing believer. That is right. The advancing believer has nothing to change his mind about; he is in the light and on the spiritual course.

Hodges states, "Christian repentance is appropriate when a pattern of sin is persisted in and needs to be changed."⁷⁷ The task of a regressing believer is not "to 'abide,' or 'stay,' in Christ and His truth, but to 'turn back' to Him."⁷⁸ Consider our Lord's admonition to the Ephesians: "I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds that you did at first" (Rev. 2:4–5).

Consider the words "fallen" and "repent." "Fallen" signifies that the believer has strayed spiritually. "Repent" means that he must change his mind and the course of his spiritual life. Sin is not the issue. The

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

focus here is the believer's entire thought process. It has been wrecked. So changing his thought process is the emphasis of Revelation 2:4–5. The believer will work on weak areas of his spiritual life, one by one, as his spiritual strength returns (Heb. 12:11–15).

Consequently, for the regressing believer, *repentance* removes him from the spiritual dungeon and sets him on a path where the potential for spiritual rehabilitation is maximized. Even in spiritual relapse, the believer recognizes his need to return to the power of the spiritual life. Therefore, he changes his mind and recalls his known sins and confesses them. Instantly, he is forgiven based on God's faithfulness and justice. Faithfulness speaks of God's character, and justice points to the horror of the cross where Christ has already paid for these sins.

To hammer home our point, let us look at two believers, David and the Prodigal Son.

David's Repentance

Consider David's sins of adultery and murder. He covered his sins, yet he was miserable. Read his testimony: "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away ... My vitality was drained away" (Ps. 32:3–4). In the midst of his agony, God in His infinite grace confronted him through the prophet Nathan. Remember that all this time, David was in spiritual regression. But when Nathan read David's sins aloud, David admitted, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:13). God's faithfulness assures him, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die" (v. 13). *Grace!*

Please note: absent from David's confession was a pledge never to commit such sins again. Why? Did he not feel sorry? That is not the issue. No pledge was made because penance was not part of the Mosaic law. David simply followed the instructions of Scripture: "when [a man] becomes guilty ... he shall confess that in which he has sinned" (Lev. 5:5).

Sure, David was shocked and sorrowful within, but these were not factors in his forgiveness. They were a reflection of his mental attitude and change of mind. Obedience to God's instruction was the basis for his forgiveness. He acknowledged his sins. "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:5 RSV).

It is normal to have inner pain for deliberately trampling our Savior's sacrificial work underfoot. But it is not the basis for forgiveness. Why didn't David assure God that he would never commit such horrendous sins again? Because God's discipline of David kept him in check; he knew he never wanted to experience that kind of discipline again. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep thy word. ... It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:67, 71 RSV). No doubt David learned an indispensable lesson never to trample God's grace underfoot. He confessed and moved forward.

Having been forgiven and restored, David, as a regressing believer, takes the initiative for rehabilitation. Psalm 51 reveals his intense desire to regain his spiritual ground with a change in mental attitude after he is restored to fellowship. Here we see that he changes his mind and the course of his spiritual life. David cries to God, "Let the bones which You have broken rejoice ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me ... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit ... open my lips that my mouth may declare Your praise" (Ps. 51:8-15).

Metaphorically, David's bones were broken as a result of his prolonged carnality. He thirsted to be completely healed. He desired a clean heart, a steadfast spirit, restoration of the joy of salvation, and above all, to be sustained with a willing spirit. Spiritually, he knew where he was before his fall; he craved to be reinstated. We see in this a repentance from the heart of David, to whom God ascribes the title "a man after His own heart" (1Sam 13:14). He wanted his spiritual life back! "Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent" (Rev. 2:5).

The Prodigal Son's Repentance

Without retelling the entire story, we remember that the Prodigal Son rebelled against his father's authority, took his inheritance, and went his own way. By the end, his funds squandered, he was reduced to feeding pigs. But he repented and returned to his father. "But when he came to himself he said ... 'I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against ... you"' (Luke 15:17–18 RSV).

See what he did? He had a *change of mind* to move out of the pigpen, back into the fellowship of his father. "I will arise and go to my father." When his father saw him from afar, his father did something spectacular. He "had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). That was even before his son's confession. His father forgave him because his returning home indicated that he admitted what he had done was wrong. That is a perfect portrait of how God treats us in grace.

Repentance and Forgiveness

But what if a regressing believer refuses to repent? Would that have an impact on his forgiveness? This question brings up an important passage. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Prov. 28:13 RSV).

Undoubtedly, this passage is for a believer in spiritual regression. It is not for one who is walking in the light, who constantly confesses his sins whenever the Holy Spirit casts light on them. The regressing believer tends to hide his sins, and he enjoys retreating to his dungeon. Unlike David and the Prodigal Son, he never entertains the idea of repentance (change of mind) and rehabilitation. Consequently, he forfeits the experience of receiving the fullest measure of God's mercy.

Would lack of repentance have an impact on his forgiveness? No! But the believer will not prosper. Though forgiven, he will not advance

spiritually, not one bit. Locked up with an unrepentant heart, he will pace about in his spiritual dungeon, 100 percent controlled by his old sin nature. Consequently, he will suffer from his bad decisions, and if his situation remains unchecked it can result in the sin unto death.

Let us illustrate with Scripture: “Bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). Take a believer who keeps company with friends who are promiscuous. The believer is more than likely to succumb to adultery or fornication on a regular basis, mentally or overtly. Yet, no matter how many times he sins, God in His grace will forgive him whenever he confesses his sin.

It is *not* a license to sin! That is the truth of Scripture. Consider our Lord’s response: “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and returns to you seven times, and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him” (Luke 17:3–4 RSV).

Here is the truth: If our Lord expects man to forgive countless times, how much more will our heavenly Father forgive. It is comforting to know that no failure on our part is too great for the grace of God. God is faithful! (2 Tim. 2:11–13)

It cannot be said enough: forgiveness of one’s sins is not based on repentance, but on *confession alone*.

Obviously, for many of us, this may be hard to swallow. Remember, sentimentality has no place in the interpretation of Scripture. The Bible does not revolve around our feelings. It rotates on the axis of hermeneutics, the science of interpretation of Scripture. One verse is to be compared with another and interpreted within the context of its passage, and that passage in the context of the Bible as a whole.

We have noted that grace is the basis for all that God does for us because of the cross. God’s favor includes, but is not limited to, the forgiveness of pre and post-salvation sins.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Forgiveness based on man's effort would make grace null and void. For instance, if God forgave a man of the sin of drunkenness *because* he had stopped abusing alcohol, then the individual could rightfully claim his work as the ground for his forgiveness. Agreed? Such a claim would void grace and shake the pillars of Scriptural truth built on the foundation of God's amazing grace.

However, a man should *change his mind* about the sin of drunkenness in order to advance his spiritual life. This would be no different than the Prodigal Son changing his mind about his sinful lifestyle and returning to his father.

The passage of 1 John 1:9 is not fuel for the engine of regression. It is for spiritual recovery from any state of maladjustment. Sadly, many Christians today want to eat their spiritual cake and have it too. They rely on confession on a regular basis. Yet they refuse to repent and return to the light. This robs them of their spiritual advancement, and that is not what God had in mind when He provided a grace solution for our sin problem. Remember, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Matt. 4:7).

Therefore it is said, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light' (Eph. 5:14).



It is my fervent prayer that any regressing believer will awake from his sleeping state and return to God in repentance, as did David and the Prodigal Son, and again walk in the Light where superabundant blessings of God abound.

CHAPTER 13

The Consequences of Unforgiveness

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matt. 6:14–15).

Years ago, God called me to be His vessel. I rebelled and went my own way. Like Jonah, I was in defiance of God's plan for my life, and in disobedience went in the opposite direction. Just as God responded to Jonah's disobedience and sent discipline his way, He pursued me with discipline for more than a decade.

There was constant financial pressure. No matter how hard I worked or how much my elder brother tried to help, all the effort was no match for the artillery barrage from the Supreme Court of Heaven. Countless times my wife, Gloria, and I went to the grocery store with only coins. Often we would have to remove items from our basket at the checkout counter because we didn't have enough money. Added to this was a series of serious car accidents.

At one point, Gloria asked me point-blank, "Are we in discipline?"

I said to her, "No way. How can we be in discipline since we are studying God's Word and praying daily?" I deceived myself; I was in denial.

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

Denial, the progeny of self-deception, is one of Satan's best weapons against God's children. Truth flares right before our eyes, yet we deny or explain it away. Consider another example. There were two believers who worked in a Christian organization and regularly attended the same church. One day a dispute arose between them. They did not speak to each other for about three months. They were separated by anger and animosity. Question: all that time, were they in fellowship—or were they like me, in denial? Scripture will soon show us the answer.

The Bible does not shy away from alerting us to the consequences of unforgiveness. We cannot get around God's Word. Often we focus on grace and at the same time forget that God is a God of protocol. By protocol we mean that God has a divine procedure by which He administers His affairs. Grace neither negates God's protocol nor nullifies His justice.

Our entire work up to this point has been heavily focused on grace. We have defined and redefined grace. In the course of our study, we noted that God's dealings with man are *always* on the basis of His grace—never earned, never deserved. It is unmerited favor.

Review

The lesson of the last chapter was an eye-opener regarding the extent of the unsearchable riches of His grace. We learned that man's effort has no bearing on God's forgiveness of man's sins. Though it may have been hard for some to accept, we learned that God forgives a regressing believer each time he confesses his sins (see Luke 17:3–4). We also learned that, though God forgives him each time he confesses his sin, his fellowship with God without repentance is always short-lived. Perhaps it is only seconds. The believer's carnal mind-set makes it difficult for him to spend much time under the ministry of the Spirit.



In this short chapter, we will look into

1. The stages of regression
2. The hindrances to God's forgiveness.

Stages of Regression

Regression is a state whereby a believer has, for some time, ceased to function spiritually or walk in the light. Regression is progressive. We will examine both stage one and the end stage.

First-Stage Regression

The first stage is usually mild; nonetheless, it is regression. It is sugar-coated with the arrogance of self-justification and self-deception. The believer constantly justifies his actions. He deceives himself by thinking that his spiritual life is still vibrant because he is a regular attendee at church activities. He may even be a deacon, lead a Bible study, or pastor a church. Inside the church, he acts like an angel; outside, he wears a mask. Yet there is no genuine reflection of Christ in his lifestyle or conversation. A believer in this state has no regard for God's Word. "He is a hearer and not a doer" (James 1:22). He is immune to God's mandates, such as, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:30–32).

The regressing believer is not kind to anyone, especially one who wrongs him. He harbors anger in his soul for a long time, defying God's command: "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:26–27).

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

A great number of believers today may well be in the first stage of regression. It would explain why Christianity is not as attractive as it should be, prompting words like those of Mahatma Gandhi, as seen on a bumper sticker: "I like your Christ; I don't like your Christians; your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

Such spiritual maladjustment warranted an epistle from the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. In it, he appealed to the brethren to forgive one another "so that no advantage would be taken ... by Satan" (2 Cor. 2:10–11). He warned, "We are not ignorant of his schemes" (v. 11). Sadly, many believers today are ignorant of Satan's schemes. He has discovered a way to make regressing believers go about their daily lives without any sense of guilt. He deceives them into believing that going to church, taking good notes, giving to the needy, and supporting God's work will make up for a lack of application of God's Word. Nothing could be further from the truth.

There are only two realms in the spiritual life, light and darkness. There is nothing in between. When a believer is not walking consistently in the light, the alternative is darkness. No amount of self-justification can change this. The apostle John was emphatic: "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6–7).

Going back to my story at the beginning of this chapter regarding my disobedience to God's plan, it is crystal clear that I was in the first stage of regression, no matter how many times I confessed my sins. When I said, "God, I disobeyed You," He replied, "Your sin is forgiven." But it did not do me any good because I did not change course. After thirteen years of denial and discipline, I yielded to God's plan. Similarly, the two believers we mentioned who did not

speak to one another for three months were like me. They too were in denial and were not walking in the light.

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes (1 John 2:9–11).

The danger is that if the believer in the first stage of regression never reverses course, he will cross the line into acute, severe regression.

Last-Stage Regression

The believer in the last stage no longer identifies with anything that has to do with God. He has quit his church activities and moved into the depth of sin. Other believers cannot identify him as one of their own because there is nothing in his life to indicate a love for God. The world doesn't identify him as a Christian because there's nothing in his life that demonstrates it.

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away ... It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.' (2 Peter 2:20–22)

Medically speaking, end-stage renal disease is the last stage of a dying kidney. At this stage, only a miracle can restore the kidney to

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

normalcy. Likewise, it takes extraordinary grace for a believer who is in the end stage of regression to recover. Perhaps such a believer is what the Holy Spirit had in mind when the apostle John wrote, "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this" (1 John 5:16).

Scary, is it not? Judgment of the *sin unto death* is one big reason why we should not abuse God's grace and take it for granted. In almost all cases, the Lord continually calls the believer back to Himself through warning and intensive discipline before the sin unto death is committed. He is gracious to the end.

Now we are ready to examine the roadblocks to restoration to fellowship.

Hindrances to God's Forgiveness

Lack of Forgiveness

The spirit of unforgiveness is one of the traits of a believer in the first stage of regression. Wherever the individual is, he carries with him anger and bitterness toward this or that person who has wronged him. He is unwilling to let it go. The believer is locked up in regression. God rejects his confession whenever he confesses his sins.

Listen carefully to the words of our Savior. "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14–15).

**The only key that unlocks the bitterness of personal
hurt is personal forgiveness.**

We cannot ignore or change God's Word to suit ourselves. The Lord was emphatic: "if you do not forgive others, then your Father *will not* forgive your transgressions." The parable on forgiveness in Matthew 18:21–35 also addresses the consequences of lack of forgiveness, and directly so in the last three verses.

We cannot explain the Scripture away or tailor it to suit us. Some may wonder, "If God's forgiveness is based on my forgiveness, then where is grace?" This question is not surprising. One's forgiveness is *always* based on grace. God doesn't forgive you because you forgave someone. But isn't that what Scripture says? At face value, yes, but let us dig down into its interpretation.

Here are two examples.

1. The believer is too bitter to confess his sin of bitterness. He confesses other known sins and deliberately leaves the sin of bitterness unconfessed. By so doing, the believer intentionally ignores God's instruction for forgiveness, which requires confession of all known sins (1 John 1:9; see also Num. 5:7; Lev. 5:5). In the process, the believer commits a new sin—the sin of disobedience. "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17).
2. The believer confesses bitterness without forgiving the one who wronged him. His unforgiving spirit keeps him locked up in the dungeon of bitterness. The only key that unlocks the bitterness of personal hurt is personal forgiveness. Bitterness and the Holy Spirit cannot coexist; they are mutually exclusive. Bitterness must be dealt with. We are warned that the root of bitterness will spring up and cause trouble (Heb. 12:15). When we forgive, bitterness is expelled from our souls.

Having forgiven, the believer now confesses his bitterness to God, whose promise is unfailing. "For if you forgive others for their

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matt. 6:14).

Unresolved Personal Conflict

This is similar to lack of forgiveness; they are different sides of the same coin. Unresolved personal conflict shows that one is carrying a bag of bitterness that must be taken care of. The Lord is serious about it. “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering” (Matt. 5:23–24). This is divine design. No one can circumvent God’s plan and expect God’s blessing.

* * *

One’s failure to forgive others of their wrongdoing will inevitably keep the believer locked in the sin of bitterness, which makes it impossible for the Holy Spirit to operate. Remember, God’s forgiveness of one’s sins does not remove the bitterness of personal hurt. The *only* key that can unlock the bitterness of personal hurt is personal forgiveness. Bitterness and the Holy Spirit cannot coexist. Man is responsible for resolving personal conflicts. One John 1:9 is not effectual until personal conflicts are resolved. God will enable anyone who desires to obey Him. May the truth of His Word impact our lives and permeate our thoughts and actions.



To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. —Lewis B. Smedes

CHAPTER 14

The Importance of Staying in Fellowship

This is the word of the LORD ... saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. (Zech. 4:6)

The importance of staying in fellowship cannot be over stressed. It is the powerhouse of the spiritual life. When we are in fellowship with God we tap into His power and "the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control" (Gal 5:22-23).

Review

We have examined the difference between repentance and confession. We noted that a believer in prolonged carnality need not stop at confession alone. He needs to change his course if he is to gain spiritual growth.

This brings us to the final thread: the importance of staying in fellowship, which we will look at in five areas:

1. Key to staying in fellowship
2. Fellowship check
3. Enjoying the fruit of the Holy Spirit

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

4. Rewardable service
5. Reward for staying in fellowship

Key to Staying in Fellowship

The key to maintaining fellowship is consistent acknowledgment of sin whenever a believer in the light is aware of it. Remember, 1 John 1:9 is not a lubricant for the engine of regression. It is a means of recovery. Many erroneously think that all they need to do while living in sin is continue applying 1 John 1:9. Surely, consistent use of confession is necessary, but a regressing believer who uses 1 John 1:9 while refusing to obey our Lord's voice to check where he "has fallen and repent" makes God angrier (Rev. 2:5). Our Lord promises swift action: "Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth" (Rev. 2:16). This is a warning every saint should take seriously, especially those in regression.

For the believer in the light, the procedure is simple: every time he sins, light exposes his sin. Each time he agrees and admits to the exposed sin, it is removed. For example, "Father, I agree that the money I took from the cash-register was theft." God wipes out the sin and purifies the believer from any other sin he is not aware of and restores him to fellowship. "If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

How many times does a believer confess his sins? He confesses as many times as he fails. Is it permission to sin? No! A growing believer is grateful for the privilege to be cleansed every time his feet slip while walking in the light. On the other hand, a believer who sees it as a license risks the wrath of eternal justice.

No one can get around God's justice, not even a spiritual giant like

David. Remember, he willfully trampled on God's righteousness, committing heinous sins, including adultery and murder. He confessed his sins, God forgave him instantly, and his fellowship was restored. But he paid fourfold.

Fellowship Check

Since one does not feel the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit, how does one know that one is in or out of fellowship?

- ✦ First, an advancing believer, or one in the light, will always know when he has committed a known sin because the Holy Spirit will illuminate his error.
- ✦ Second, the believer out of fellowship forfeits the fruit of the Spirit: unconditional love, joy, peace, and much more (Gal. 5:22). Therefore, one who is bitter, jealous, envious, and the like has lost fellowship with Holy God.

The remedy is for us to confess any sin whenever the light of His Spirit exposes it.

Enjoying the Fruit of the Holy Spirit

To the Galatians, the apostle Paul wrote, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23). This awesome fruit is only available to believers who are in the light. While the believer is in fellowship, God the Holy Spirit manifests various aspects of His fruit according to His wisdom and purpose. Remember, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is for believers. No unbeliever can duplicate the love of Christ; the believer can because of the Spirit's ministry.

Rewardable Service

All Christian service resulting in eternal rewards is achieved through the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. Competition, self-glory, approbation-lust, and power-lust are not of God, but of Satan who wants to rob us of our eternal reward.

It is heartbreaking that these sins are prominent in the church today. Everywhere one looks, there are hands in the air drawing attention to self rather than to God. Believers no longer look to God for rewards; they look to others. They give gifts to the church to gain recognition and praise. Competition runs rampant; ministers compete against other ministers and members against members. These are marks of spiritual babyhood or regression.

The Lord warns us, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1). We were created for the praise of His glory (Isa. 43:7). Glory only goes to God; we are not to rob Him of His glory. (Isa. 42:8).

A believer must learn to be in fellowship consistently while thinking and practicing the truth in his soul.

While we should be mindful of God's blessing on earth, more importantly we should be concerned about the eternal state where our blessings will last forever. We must learn to serve God's way if we expect His approval of "well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21), both in time and in eternity. To be rewarded, all work must be accomplished under the influence and mentorship of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a believer must learn to be in fellowship consistently while thinking and practicing the truth in his soul.

Again, God's work is done by God's Spirit: "This is the word of the

LORD ... saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The apostle Paul echoes Zachariah, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil.2:13). The apostle Peter states, "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving *by the strength which God supplies*; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:11; emphasis added).

If our service to God is produced through us by His Spirit—and it is—then is there room for boasting? Is there room for approbation-lust? Is there room for competition? Is there room for self-promotion or self-glory? There is none. This is the teaching of grace.

The Reward of Staying in Fellowship

No volume can list all of the many blessings from maintaining fellowship with God. As we conclude our study, we mention only a few of the benefits enjoyed by staying in fellowship.

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

God in His infinite wisdom designed a plan to help keep His saints in sync with Himself. He wants us to enjoy what He enjoys twenty-four/seven—the fruit of His Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

For example, only when we are in fellowship with God can we share "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension" (Phil. 4:7). When we see things around us fall apart, we are not shaken, because we have His peace in our soul. Similarly, we patiently wait for God to respond to our needs according to His perfect timing.

Divine Guidance

A believer in fellowship enjoys God's guidance. "For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death" (Ps. 48:14). The believer, under the mentorship of the Holy Spirit and with the arsenal of God's Word in his soul, receives guidance and encouragement for this life. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). God will plant the feet of His beloved child at the right place at the right time, revealing God's plan for him. This is divine guidance.

Effective Prayer Life

A believer who constantly keeps fellowship with God is one who is in tune with heaven. He is preoccupied with Christ and the affairs of God's kingdom. He is a true ambassador, and his prayer gets a VIP response. "It will come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).

Being an Object of God's Special Love

There is nothing like being an object of the love of the Father. Walking in the light means that one has mastered the importance of obedience to God and His Word. The believer has learned the importance of applying Bible truth consistently. He has come to love God and expresses His love to others. Our Lord said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21).

What can surpass the Lord disclosing Himself to you in a personal way because of your obedience to His Word? Nothing!

CHAPTER 15

Final Thoughts

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)

What a tapestry! We are grateful for the mentorship of the Spirit, and to Him alone goes the credit for this exposition.

People often make an effort to capture the last words of a dying man, for in them are often the summary of his earthly journey. Consider our Lord's final words before His death: "Father, Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Luke tells us that "having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:46).

Those who read this verse will recall David's words of praise, "Into your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth" (Ps. 31:5). *Truth!* The echo of truth was heard from the foot of Golgotha to the corridors of heaven! Jesus drew attention and honor to God's Word. Nothing was more important than His Father's Word. In His humanity the Lord gave His life over to God's Word. He made it His priority.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when Satan tempted Him: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Father" (Matt. 4:4). He began studying the Scripture at an early age and continued throughout His life (Luke 2:46–52). His human soul was saturated with God's Word, which gave Him divine perspective on His every thought, word, and deed. It kept His feet

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

firmly secured on God's path. Truth propelled Him to totally fulfill the Father's plan for His life, even the death on the cross.

Consider His last words before His ascension. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. After He had said these things, He was lifted up" (Acts 1:8-9).

Jesus Christ came to earth because of the sins of the world. Biblical truth gave Him victory over sin and death. A prudent student of God's Word will give attention to both the triumphant words of our Lord on the cross and His last words before He ascended.

With these closing words, take your mind back to the cover of this book. Pause and consider the title *Forgiveness by Confession Alone*. Let your mind travel back to the garden of Eden, to the eternal counsel of God, where the three members of the Godhead said, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26 RSV). Accordingly, "God created man in His own image" (Gen. 1:27), for "the praise of His glory" (Isa. 43:7).

For an undisclosed time, Adam fulfilled God's desire for his life. Adam had close fellowship with God and simultaneously worshipped and praised Him. One day something went terribly wrong. Man violated God's single prohibition, and his fellowship and relationship with God were broken. To reestablish their relationship, God made a painful decision to offer His Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice. Consider that thought for a moment: the One who created us was the same One who hung on the cross, "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

God accomplished all this "while we were yet sinners" (Rom. 5:8). This is God's grace in action. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

God did it all! He has paved the way for reconciliation, redemption, and restoration of man. For many of us, this study is an eye-opener. We now know how grace governs God's work, that salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone. That once the relationship has been established, it can't be broken. Fellowship can be broken, but the relationship with God is permanent.

That is not all. Confession of our sins alone restores our fellowship with God. No penance is required. One is forgiven not because of one's remorseful attitude, but because of the work of Christ on the cross. Grace.

For others, this study is a source of challenge and encouragement: a challenge to do what we must do to stay on spiritual course, and an encouragement knowing that God's faithfulness has no correlation to ours. *If we are faithless, He remains faithful* (2 Tim. 2:13).

Like all the books we have read, soon we will come to the last word of the last page of this book, and we will pass it on to someone else or put it in a shelf. Before we do, it would be beneficial to answer some important questions regarding our spiritual lives.

- ✦ Understanding that the problem of the human race is spiritual, how is my spiritual life?
- ✦ Am I a part of the problem or the solution?
- ✦ Do I have an unforgiving spirit?
- ✦ Do I put into action the biblical truth I learn?
- ✦ Am I deepening my relationship with God? Do I take this seriously?
- ✦ Is my life repelling people or bringing them to Christ?
- ✦ If I die today, what rewards will eternity hold for me?

Forgiveness By Confession Alone

- ✦ Will I, on my deathbed, honestly be able to make the apostle Paul's words my own? "For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day" (2 Tim. 4:6–8 RSV).

Beloved, the answers to these questions are a matter between you and the Lord. God the Holy Spirit has enabled us to communicate His truth for the benefit of us all. Each of us needs to stop and reevaluate our own spiritual lives. Or as the apostle Paul put it, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5). We cannot afford to ignore God's mandate. The price is too great. So let's take time, do some soul-searching, and amend our ways where applicable.

As we do, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.



Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24–25)

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Moses C. Onwubiko is an evangelist and international Bible Conference teacher. He is President and Founder of Grace Evangelistic Ministries, which was established in 1997. This ministry is a nondenominational, Bible teaching, missionary organization whose first priority is to take the gospel of "faith alone in Christ alone" to a lost and dying world.

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