

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Lesson 10

RG² and CONFESSION

KEY PASSAGE(S):

⁸ “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8, 9).

THE BIG PICTURE

God’s *Story* restores/reverses the Fall. It is not **from work for work**. It is from **work to rest**. If nothing we do can merit God’s favor **prior** to God’s fullest and final redemptive act, then nothing we do can merit God’s favor **after** His fullest and final redemptive act. **Anything conditional in the Christian life is counter to the cross.**

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER:

1. The cross secures a forgiveness for all sin, past, present, and future.
2. There is nothing I can do to undo what God has done.
3. The advocacy of Christ on behalf of His people is unconditional.
4. Christian victory is seeing His victory as being our victory.
5. The Holy Spirit works the fruit of confession and repentance in the life of His people.
6. There is nothing a believer can do to change their relationship to the Father.

OVERVIEW:

For whatever reason most Christians live in a state of perpetual bondage because of their inability to embrace a complete forgiveness from God and a full fellowship with God that is merited by grace alone and maintained by grace alone. Most have tragically drawn a sharp distinction between their positional justification in Christ and their progressive sanctification (i.e. Christian life, growth, and experience) in the world.

BASIC IDEAS:

1. The person and work of Jesus forgives the believing of all their transgressions (Col. 2:13).
2. Confession as a fruit of the Holy Spirit is a natural part of the Christian experience.
3. After an individual comes to God’s provision by grace through faith, His ongoing forgiveness is not conditional.

GROW 201 – What We Teach

TODAY'S LESSON:

Through the years, many of us have encountered the following questions concerning forgiveness:

1. "Do Christians have to confess and ask forgiveness for the sins they commit after salvation?"
2. "Is the purpose of confession for our benefit to declare to God that we are going to turn from sin? If we are already forgiven then why does 1 John 1:9 say he will forgive our sins *if* we confess?"
3. "How does God's holiness fit in with the idea that our sin does not break fellowship with God? If He hates sin, how can we still have fellowship with Him if we are in sin?"

There are several issues involved in the answer. **First**, what is the idea of fellowship with God? **Second**, how full is the payment in the area of sins forgiven? **Finally**, what is the larger context of 1 John 1:9 and how does it affect my understanding of this idea? I am convinced if we examine the above thoughts, we can have a biblical response to the questions being addressed.

Closely tied to the idea of our forgiveness by God is our fellowship with God. Salvation establishes our fellowship with God (Cf. Lesson 4). Some would suggest our sin breaks this fellowship and can only be restored after our sin is confessed and hence forgiven. Some would equally suggest our fellowship with God is also contingent on a walk of faith or obedience or by being led of the Spirit or walking in the Spirit (Cf. Lesson 8). Because of the tie that binds fellowship with forgiveness, it is impossible to separate the two ideas. We will begin this study by noting our fellowship with God.

I. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Our challenge is to face a misunderstanding of such ideas as fellowship and forgiveness. Part of our initial problem is the basis from which we evaluate fellowship. Fellowship is often described as a "feeling." "I don't feel my relationship with God is right." Movies, books, psychology, education, and often our own human relationships perpetuate this misunderstanding. If we can draw a parallel between the cutting of the marriage covenant and that of salvation, perhaps we can understand where we have gone wrong. When one cuts a covenant with another, it is not based on emotion. To be sure, emotion is involved, but the emotion is not the basis for the cut covenant. If the basis is emotional, then when one no longer "feels" in love they will break the covenant. Yet many of us see the folly of basing our relationship in marriage on emotion for such a basis proves unstable. So also is it to be considered folly to assess whether or not we have fellowship with God based on how we "feel."

Let us consider several thoughts concerning our fellowship with God.

GROW 201 – What We Teach

First, our fellowship with God was lost when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. Prior to the Fall, Adam had unhindered fellowship with God. After the Fall, his fellowship with God was broken. God restored fellowship by offering up a blood sacrifice. If the fellowship after the blood sacrifice was temporal, it is only because the offering brought was temporal. This animal blood sacrifice was a temporal type of a future permanent antitype found in Jesus Christ. We will note this idea in the next section. **God not only completely pardons but equally accepts.**

Second, fellowship with God under the First (i.e. Old) Testament was contingent (thus tentative) on the offering of blood, whereas in the New Testament (i.e. Covenant) fellowship is permanent because of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Third, because fellowship with God is a consequence of His cross work, nothing we do can break [i.e. undo] this fellowship. This is a point of Hebrews 4:14-16. Believers come with confidence to the throne of grace. Neither our obedience nor rebellion bars us from this throne. If justice marked the throne, then none would come. But it is a throne characterized by grace.

Fourth, we can fail to enjoy our fellowship with God by neglect or willful choice. If we can understand fellowship to be a synonym for salvation, then perhaps we can understand how we might fail to enjoy and appreciate our fellowship/salvation by neglect or willful choice. This enjoyment, however, does not break fellowship (i.e. lose salvation); it is only a failure to enjoy what is true.

Finally, if obedience maintains fellowship and rebellion breaks fellowship, then we will never rest from our work, since we will never know if we have done enough obeying or too much rebelling.

II. THE EXTENT OF OUR LORD'S DEATH

The second issue concerns the extent of our Lord's death, "How full is the payment in the area of sins forgiven?" Why do so many believers still bear the burden of sin? It is not because they are sinners. That truth will not change until the loss of the old man. It is because they do not understand the full extent of Calvary's work on sin.

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the intent of the author is to show the superiority of Christ as the fulfillment of all First Covenant shadows. One of those areas accented is that of His sacrificial work. Within the book there is constant reference being made to the *once and for all* nature of His sacrificial act (Hebrews 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 11, 12).

- "and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place **once for all**, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12).
- "Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; **but now once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26).

GROW 201 – What We Teach

- “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).
- ¹⁰“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**. ¹¹Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹²but He, **having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time**, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD” (Heb. 10:10-12).

Because this sacrifice paid for sin in full, the impact forgave *all* sin forever. This appears to be the clear teaching of Scripture. Consider the following passages as they relate to the impact of Christ's death on sin (Acts 13:38, 39; Col. 2:13; 1 John 1:7, 9; 2:12). Those who come by faith and appropriate the provision of Calvary for themselves have their sins forgiven: past, present, and future (Cf. Lesson 5 Point I; Lesson 9 Q1, Q2).

In fact, in eternity past when such an act was considered and then manifested in time, all of our sin was still yet future. **He died for our sin before it was ever committed.** The only thing lacking was an expression of our faith that would take God at His Word. If *all* sin has been forgiven, then for what sins are we asking to be forgiven? Instead, we should be thanking God daily for the fullness of His forgiveness. This does not negate the necessity to be forgiven on a daily basis, but it does negate the idea that such forgiveness is conditional or somehow breaks my fellowship with God.

The power of His forgiveness continues to this day. He is even now interceding in our behalf, providing a forgiveness that is unmerited and unconditional (1 John 2:1, 2; Rom. 8:34). Such a picture is beautifully acted out in John 13 when our Lord washed the feet of the disciples. Jesus told Peter that even with soiled feet he was *still* clean even though his feet were soiled (John 13:10). The stunning element in the story is how Jesus washed Peter's feet even though Peter *never asked!* Jesus washed his feet unconditionally, without being asked. If Jesus forgave us *only* when we asked, there would still be unforgiven sin in the life of the true believer. Such an individual, as identified by our Lord, “has no part with Him” (John 13:8). This person is not saved.

We can right now rejoice in a forgiveness that is full and sufficient. We can enjoy a forgiveness that is lacking in nothing. As a believer, we can rejoice in the fact that we are forgiven.

Friend, there is nothing about the cross that is tentative or partial. The cross is radical and exhausting. The cross work “spent” or “depleted” God’s sentence against sin. The work of Jesus is so thorough there is nothing left. You still sin, but God does not impute sin to your account. Sin has an intrinsic demerit placed in it by God, but He does not punish you for your sin. This He did at the cross.

III. 1 JOHN 1:9

Perhaps without exception very few evangelical Christians are unaware of 1 John 1:9.

“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)

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Many have been taught how sin breaks fellowship with God and the only way to restore such fellowship is to confess their sins in order to receive His forgiveness and thereby restore their walk/fellowship with God. Our desire has been to consider the text of Scripture in its biblical context and what drove the author to write (i.e. historical context). I am of the opinion that 1 John 1:9 has been mishandled and thus misappropriated by the church at large. This mishandling and misappropriation instead of liberating the people of God has minimized the gospel and enslaved God's people to senseless introspection, anxious uncertainty and a misguided defining of the Christian life.

First, with any text it is necessary to find what the author's intended meaning is. Sometimes we come to a text with the wrong question. If we are asking the wrong question, then we will come up with the wrong answer. First John 1:9 is not providing the Christian with a formula for dealing with their sin/failure. As our study will show us, the context is not Christians confessing their sin to restore fellowship, but rather those who deny their sin and are unsaved without this confession of sin and Jesus as the singular Savior.

Second, John's use of fellowship has more to do with the larger idea of God's redemptive work and the resultant body produced by that redemptive work and one's relationship to both. It is not addressing the sins of the confessor.

Third, saving faith recognizes one's own sinfulness and the sole solution for that sinfulness in JESUS who is the INCARNATE CHRIST. This is biblical confession. Anything other than this is non-redemptive.

Fourth, once the believer confesses [agrees with God] JESUS as the INCARNATE CHRIST, he is placed in JESUS and thus lives/walks/practices JESUS.

Fifth, as a consequence of being IN CHRIST, His people walk, fail and agree with God concerning their sin and Jesus as their Savior. The good news in all of this is, "HE IS MY ADVOCATE WHO SATISFIES (i.e. PROPITIATES) GOD'S JUDGMENT AGAINST ME AND MY SIN."

Let us consider this text in greater detail. The paragraph containing 1 John 1:9 runs from 1:5 through 2:2. Pastor John is writing to encourage the churches that he pastored. His big idea is found in 1 John 2:1, 2. He is speaking counter to a prevailing mindset concerning sin and Calvary. Thus, there are two groups of people identified. First, there is the "we" group (1:5-10). The second group are the "My little children" group (2:1, 2). One is either in the group who do not agree with God concerning sin and Jesus or one is in the group making up those who do agree with God concerning their sin and Jesus as their Savior.

Notice First John's thesis.

GROW 201 – What We Teach

JOHN'S THESIS (v. 5)

- As the **incarnate CHRIST** (vv. 1-4),
 - He is **still without** darkness **AT ALL** (v. 5)

Then note his assumption.

JOHN'S ASSUMPTION

- **Just as** Jesus is without darkness at all, **so also** His people.
- If Jesus is the **INCARNATE CHRIST**.
 - You cannot walk in sin (v. 6)
 - You cannot say you have no sin (v. 8)
 - You cannot say you are not sinning (v. 10)

It is imperative we not forget certain truths.

REMEMBER

- **IN CHRIST** is the **cause**.
- **WALKING** in the **LIGHT** is the **consequence**.
- The flow is always (and only) one way. Being **IN CHRIST** changes one's walk. One's walk cannot change being **IN CHRIST**.
- Walking (v.7), confessing (v. 9), sinning (2:1) cannot change one's relationship to God; but one's relationship to God **IN CHRIST** changes one's walking, confessing, and sinning.

Throughout this paragraph, John contrasts the Gnostics with those who are in the local church.

APPLICATION/PROOF (1:6-2:2)

- 6 **GNOSTICS** – the error
 - 7 **THE LOCAL CHURCH**
- 8 **GNOSTICS** – the error
 - 9 **THE LOCAL CHURCH**
- 10 **GNOSTICS** – the error
 - 2:1, 2 **THE LOCAL CHURCH**
- Notice why 2:1, 2 complete the “**If/Then**” structure.
- Each falsehood is met with a direct response.
- Notice how it becomes intimate and pastoral (“My little children”).
 - Q - “I am one of the confessors and yet I still sin, what am I to make of this?”
 - A - John answers that question in 2:1, 2.

The answer to the sin issue is Jesus as our Advocate. It is not confession of sin.

The group identified as not agreeing with God is noted by their practice and their confession. John notes three things about this group.

GROW 201 – What We Teach

- 6 Walking in darkness; practice darkness.
 - 8 “NO SIN” - We have no personal guilt, no principle of sin.
 - 10 “NOT SINNED” - Perfect active indicative. This is a denial of any specific acts of sin.

IF we do not keep this text in its historical context, we run into significant problems. The sloppiness of verses 6, 8, and 10 are positions maintained by the Gnostics [i.e. the deceivers/liars]. The “attack” by Pastor John on the Gnostics is not directed at those within the local church. First John 2:1, 2 are the verses directed at those within the local church. Notice three key words: **Practice** (v. 6), **Deceive** (v. 8) and **Liar** (v. 10). The idea of **Practice** is synonymous in 1 John with walk, abide, keep and love. The **Deceivers** and **Liars** are those who **deny** Jesus as INCARNATE CHRIST (Deceiver - 1 John 1:8; 2:26; 3:7; 4:6 / Liar - 1 John 1:6, 10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10).

There are a series of parallel ideas in this paragraph contrasting the two groups. One is either in the deceiving and lying group or one is in the confessing and believing group.

The issue in 1 John is what group are you in. He boils it down by contrasting those who confess with those who do not confess.

- You either **confess** JESUS as the INCARNATE CHRIST
 - Or
 - You **reject** such a claim.
 - Thus, you are either **lost** without JESUS
 - Or
- You are **IN JESUS**.

CONCLUSION:

Do you recognize who you are in light of who He is? You are a sinner in desperate need of THE SAVIOR. As believers we are not to sin . . . But when we sin we have an ADVOCATE and His name is JESUS. JESUS is the only one who can satisfy God’s justice against us. In light of this, we should no more single out 1 John 1:9 than we would 1 John 1:7 or 1 John 2:1. Each of those elements celebrate a single truth. JESUS IS ENOUGH.

We often look at 1 John 1:9 as *the* verse for maintaining one’s relationship with God, and to consider an alternative look is difficult. The desire is not to stir up controversy but to know truth. To see the magnitude of God's forgiveness and love and to understand His Word more intimately so that we might know Him more personally is the end of all Bible study. God has provided for us a salvation that is fathomless in scope. If we constantly have to monitor our sin, we have unknowingly shifted our focus away from Him to our sin. Moreover, such a focus is wrong. We are to be looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, not making checklists of sins committed.

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Like many other passages, we have tried to make 1 John 1:9 say more than is there. The only way we can enjoy fellowship with the Father and His Son is if we are in the light. Calvary is the only way to become a child of the light. According to vv.6-10, there is really only one condition that must be met if we are to enjoy fellowship with God: we must be born-again. If we have not come to Him with the acknowledgement of our sin and thus receiving from His gracious hand full and complete forgiveness and as a result of His enabling ministry are now walking in truth, then we are self-deceiving liars and know not the truth. We are lost.

BASIC APPLICATION	
1. What did you find helpful from today's lesson?	7. Do Christians have to confess and ask forgiveness for the sins that they commit after salvation?
2. What did you find confusing from today's lesson?	8. What is the idea of fellowship with God?
3. How does this lesson help you in thinking through the gospel?	9. What is the true believer's present standing in Christ?
4. How does this lesson help you in how you view yourself?	10. In 1 John, on what is the action of walking and confessing contingent?
5. What was your "aha" moment?	
6. How might this text challenge you in your daily activity?	

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Matthew 6 - The Lord's Prayer