

1st John 1: 8-10; “The Confession of Sins”, Sermon # 3 in a series entitled – “Behold What Manner of Love”, A Communion Sermon Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 4th, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

It is particularly appropriate as we come to the Lord’s Table this afternoon to be able to fix our minds on the subject of how we should view ourselves after we come to Christ. Are we sinners, or are we saints? The truth of the matter is, that we are both, in precisely defined Biblical ways, and John will explain this to us. We have in these three verses the subject of the confession of sin. 1st – In relation to what our nature is like following our conversion to Christ. 2nd – In regard to our recognition of sins in our heart and life, day by day. And 3rd – In terms of the danger of our denying the sins which God has so clearly seen. And so, since it appears that we have something to learn in this regard, something which will relate very well to our partaking of the Lord’s Supper this afternoon, let us take them in that order, and pray to be strengthened in our faith by the truths conveyed to us here.

1st of all – Let’s think about the subject of the confession of sin in relation to what our nature is like following our conversion to Christ. (verse 8)

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Now, if we look at the verses that precede this one, we find that John is not addressing unbelievers, he is addressing Christians. He is addressing all Christians in all generations. In verse 6 he says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, (that is with God) and we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” And verse 7 says: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” When John says “we” he is including all Christians. If we say that we are having fellowship with God, and yet we are walking in darkness, if that is our practice, we are lying to ourselves. We are not practicing the truth. What it means for the true Christian to walk in the light, is that in accordance with all of the truth of God’s word, they will go about to practice righteousness by the power of the Spirit. If the one who professes to be a Christian does not go about to obey God according to the truth of His word, by the power of the Spirit, then nothing has really changed in their heart, and they will deceive themselves and others around them as to whether they have really been regenerated, whether they really have been born again in their heart.

But let us now go on to verse 8. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; that is, we can deceive ourselves in regard to the truth of what we are, after we become a Christian. For the truth is, that we are indeed saints now, in the sight of God, because we have been justified in God’s sight by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and we have had the work of initial and definitive sanctification wrought upon our heart; and this work has changed us in our spirit. Our heart has been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ. The Holy Spirit has come and done a work in our spirit. He caused us to be born again; He has given us eternal and spiritual life. He has so changed our heart that we no longer love sin. Its dominion has been taken away; its ruling reigning power has been broken. It is because of the work of Christ through and by His Spirit, in accordance with the will and purpose of the Father, that we have been set free to serve the living and the true God. 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 13 says: “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is because of the work of Christ that God the Father considers us and looks upon us as His holy ones.

But let us ask ourselves a further question. When we became a Christian, was the very in-being of sin removed? Did the work of regeneration take away the principle of sin altogether from my heart? That law which is in my members, was it completely removed out of my mind and heart

and body? The answer is very clearly given to us here; no it was not. “If we say we have no sin (That is, sin in the singular, not sins in the plural), we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So John is saying that it is a very dangerous thing, spiritually speaking, to think that because all of our sins have been forgiven us, and the guilt of them removed, that the principle of sin in our hearts which is called “the flesh” in many places in the Scripture, has also been removed. Sadly, it was not. Now, at this point, many people may question why God permitted the flesh to remain on, as a principle in the life of a Christian; one who has been forgiven and is seen by God as one of His saints, and called by God, one of His holy ones. Could God have not removed it altogether from our being, immediately after we believed Christ? Yes, most certainly He could have, and someday He will do that very thing when you die, dear Christian. He will indeed remove it altogether from your spirit. And at a later day, the Day of Christ’s return, He will give to every Christian a body which has no sin principle in it at all, and the days of sin shall be over for all of God’s elect people, forever.

So, why did God permit this flesh, this sinful principle, to remain? He did so, in order that you might participate in the process of your progressive sanctification; your progressively being made holy. Yes, God calls us His saints; He sees us as His holy ones, He has declared us righteous by and through the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, and it is He who has set us apart to His working in us that we might actually work at becoming more like what we are called. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do for his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2: 12 and 13) “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in in all your conduct.” (1st Peter 1: 15) “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” (1st Timothy 6: 11) “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5: 24) You see, God has ordained that you, dear Christian would have a part in this process of your making progress in righteousness and holiness. This is a great part of the work that He has called you to do. “God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” (2nd Timothy 1: 9)

Let us not deceive ourselves; the work of regeneration, being born again by the Spirit of God, is a very great work. God has taken out the heart of stone and given us, as those who have believed in Jesus, a heart of flesh. But the Old Nature, the Old Man in us is not yet dead, but He has received His death wound in your conversion to Christ. Now Christ expects you to willingly join Him in the work of mortification of sin. “If you by the Spirit are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Romans 8: 13) “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Who is Paul addressing here? Unbelievers? No, not at all. He is addressing dear brothers and sisters who have much work to do in relation to their hearts every day; the work of mortification of sin. In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 14 it says: “Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord...” To be holy is to be separate from sin, and Christians are called to be holy.

Here we are told that holiness is something which is to be pursued. It is not that we will totally attain it here in this life. But our pursuing it shows that we have not deceived ourselves. The truth is in us. Ask yourself as you think about your partaking of the Lord’s Supper in a few minutes: Am I pursuing holiness? Do I know the reality of the everyday battle of mortifying sin in my body and spirit? There are thoughts and lusts which I need to put to death. I need to learn to guard my heart. I need to realize that unless I cultivate good things in my thoughts that my flesh will attempt to lead me back to sinful thoughts and lusts. Let us pray that we will not be deceived, and rather that we will make progress in righteousness, holiness, and truth.

2nd – Let us consider the subject of confession in regard to our recognition of sins in our heart and life, day by day. (verse 9)

We have now established the fact that we as Christians have this body of death that we carry about with us day by day – the flesh. And that to deny it is to deceive ourselves. John now sets

before our eyes this most wonderful of conditional statements in verse 9, so that we will come to realize the greatness of the reality of what Christ has done for us at the cross, and what it will mean for ourselves very practically in our relationship with God. “If we confess our sins”; that is the condition. It is a very strange thing, but sometimes Christians do not take the word of God at face value. They are more interested in their own logical reasoning than they are in just taking God at His word. I once heard a young Christian man tell me that it was not necessary to confess our sins to God after conversion because God has forgiven us all of our sins; past, present, and future. And therefore, there was no need to confess them as they keep coming up. I have heard other people tell me that they thought that it was not necessary to confess sin because it seemed too much like a work which was trying to merit salvation. Truly, there is a need for more accurate understanding, concerning this verse.

It is true that when we first come to Christ and ask for the forgiveness of all of our sins, that we are justified in the sight of God. In terms of our person, all of our sins, past, present, and future were imputed to Christ and His sacrifice at the cross, and we were forgiven of all of our sins, as a whole and complete group of them in the mind of God. In the holy mind of God, He will not impute iniquity to the one trusting in the Lord Jesus. This is a very glorious and precious and wonderful truth to consider. God declares a believer righteous in His sight for Christ’s sake. They are accepted by God, in the Beloved. All of their iniquities and sins will not be imputed to them, ever. There is therefore, now no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Why then should a believer be required to confess their sins after they have found this great salvation? It is because God would have us to acknowledge the reality of our continual day by day need of Christ’s sacrifice and His cleansing us by His blood, in the on-going process of our becoming more mature and holy as a Christian.

Our confession of the sins which we find in our heart day by day, is what God requires from us to prove our sincerity in relation to the grace which has already been given to us. We confess our sins and we mourn over them when we realize that the sinful things we have done in our speech and actions, have dishonored Him and hurt the people whom we have sinned against. The confession of our sins shows God that we are in dead earnest about dealing with the remaining corruptions of sin in our hearts, and repenting of those actions which He is not pleased with. This confession of sins is something that is an on-going part of our progressive sanctification. Proverbs 28: 13 says: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” It is not a good thing in God’s sight to cover your sins. You will not prosper spiritually speaking. But confession is good for the soul.

Think of David in Psalm 32. He says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” He has just described for us a true believer. But now listen to this. Verse 3 – “When I kept silent, my bones grew old, through my groaning all the day long.” “For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer.” “Selah.” “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden.” “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and You forgave the iniquity (the guilt) of my sin.” Oh, how this freed David up from all oppression of heart, soul, and spirit. How he rejoiced to be pardoned and forgiven of his sins.

Now, I want you to see, and to understand that it is not simply when you have committed some great sin like David’s sin with Bathsheba, that you need to confess your sins. You should understand that God would have you to confess your sins wherever and whenever you find them in yourself, in your heart or in your actions. God expects you to keep short accounts with Him. He does not expect you to save up your sins in your mind and heart and confess them to Him once a month, or once in a year. He is looking for confession, moment by moment and day by day, wherever and whenever sin is found by you in your heart or life. He already knows all about it, but He wants you to see the heinousness and evil of it, even as a believer in Christ. Confession of sins

to God keeps the relationship with Him clear when there is a purpose and endeavor to walk with Him in a manner well-pleasing to Him.

Yes, it is true there may be consequences for your sins. You may fall under the chastening hand of the Lord for a time. But He will restore you and your soul in time. None of God's mercy in this regard is any excuse for you allowing yourself in a course of sin for any length of time. The sooner that you confess and repent, the better. The beauty of our text is found in the words – "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. There is a most real certainty of what God will do, upon each and every confession of sins; He will faithfully forgive and He will faithfully cleanse. He can do this because His justice has been satisfied by sacrifice and death of our blessed Savior. Samuel Eyles Pierce says this: "We have access to the divine Father spiritually and mentally." "We come before Him with our complaints: we deeply bewail what we are in our fallen nature: we confess before Him the prevalency of sin: we express what our cases are: we recite before Him what the glorious Mediator hath been, and done, and completed." "This is performed under and by the inward energy of the Holy Spirit within us." "The Father is pleased to open our minds and let in upon them, such blessed conceptions of our precious Lord Jesus, as carry us before we are aware, from all our sins and miseries." "He gives us such clear views of the eternal dignity of the Person of Christ, as fills us with holy admiration." He admits us to entertain such thoughts of the everlasting worth and perfection of His righteousness and offering, as lead us off entirely from ourselves: and off from sin too: so as that we clearly apprehend in our own minds, the value and virtue of Christ's most precious blood: by means of which we have the Lord Jesus Christ so inwardly made known to us, and upon us, that we see ourselves to be in the sight of our heavenly Father, clean from all sin in the blood of the Lamb." With these thoughts in mind, let us come down front and gather together to partake of the Supper.

3rd – Let us think together of the confession of sin in relation to the danger of our denying the sins which God has so clearly seen.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." How many sins have we committed in our heart and mind in the past month since we met together around this table? Only the Lord knows. He sees more clearly than we do. There is a danger of our denying what God so clearly sees, and in doing so, we make Him a liar. I do not think that any of us would consciously think of trying to make Him such. I think that as we gather around this table once again, we should ask ourselves whether we see clearly where we might personally be falling short of God's glory; of not living up to everything that He has shown to us in terms of spiritual truth. Let us ask ourselves if there are sins that we should confess to Him in relation to our not loving Him with all of our heart, or not loving our neighbor as ourselves. The purpose of our coming to the table, to partake of the Lord's Supper, is to remember Christ, and all that He has done for us in His life, His death, and His resurrection from the dead. But in doing this, we are once again confessing, anew and afresh, our need of God's forgiveness and our need to be cleansed from the guilt of our sins, and the pollution which sin has brought to our heart and mind. We know from what we have heard in the message, that God can and He will, cleanse you, dear Christian, from all sin. Let us pray to be pure in heart. Let us pray to see the purity of the heart and mind of our Lord Jesus Christ, and ask to be transformed more and more into His blessed image, as we look to Him. Having received these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.