

UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS:
Scripture: Matthew 3:1-9

INTRO: Our study has been that of unconditional forgiveness. It is my strong conviction that in order to be forgiven, repentance must take place. Forgiveness that is not based on repentance is not forgiveness in the true sense of the word.

The doctrine of conversion in the Bible contains within it two doctrines. These are repentance and faith. These are the only two things set out in Scripture for man to be saved. I mentioned to you last message that there are those who see repentance and faith as synonyms, and thus there is only one requirement to be saved, and that is faith. However, we showed that repentance and faith are not synonyms. What happens to people who believe but do not repent? In Luke 13 Jesus said that those who do not repent will perish. And in Luke 24:47 He said that repentance should be preached to all nations.

But, there is a doctrine that goes along with repentance that is also very important. I was also amazed at the silence of other preachers and Christian theologians on that subject. It is this matter I want to share in this message.

At the close of the last message I mentioned to you Matthew 3:1-9 which was read for us earlier. Look with me at verses 5-8 (read). Now, here is the question I left you with in the last message: How did John know who had fruit that showed repentance had taken place and who did not? How did he know the Scribes and Pharisees did not bear fruit worthy of repentance? Surely he could not follow them for several weeks before baptism to make sure they had the right fruit. New believers in the NT were baptized on the day they converted. And here is the question: how did preachers know they had the right fruit? How did John know when the Scribes and Pharisees came to him that they did not have the right fruit?

Well, look at verse 5-6. Those who came for baptism came confessing their sins. Here is a matter that must follow true repentance. I am not trying to introduce the Roman Catholic doctrine of confessing sins to a priest. Very little has produced more sin in the church than that heretical doctrine. But confession of sin is an almost entirely neglected teaching in the church and yet one of the most important matters for a Christian to gain full victory. And if we find repentance hard, confession is at least ten times as hard for us.

I checked the major theologians I have in my library. If you want to find a subject in a theology book, the best way is to go to the index of subjects. In R.A. Torrey's theology, the word confession did not occur in the index of subjects; neither in Henry C. Thiessen, and not even in Eriksen. Only Strong's Systematic Theology mentioned it, and that only once, and it only included it to show that Roman Catholicism was wrong about confession. In Evangelicalism both the doctrines of repentance and confession have received a lot of opposition in the last years. It is soundly denied by some professing Christians that one needs to repent at all. It is also soundly denied that one needs to confess. Then I checked the internet and there are titles like this: 12 Reasons why Christians do not need to confess their sins.

A few years ago a book was recommended to me. It is titled, "Forgiven Forever", and is written by Hector MacLeod. The foreword is written by Bill Perkins, executive director of Compass International. His name will likely be familiar to anyone involved with prophecy conferences. He says in the forward, "Short of heaven, it will be impossible to know the impact this book has had on Believers. Hector McLeod never sought to be the pastor of a mega church. He never desired to be a famous writer. He never pursued a large radio or Internet audience. And the chances are good that you've never heard of him."

And what does this man teach? To be saved we must confess we are a sinner. After that, confession is never needed again. All our sins were forgiven, past, present and future. Here are his words, "We must repent when we initially come to Christ (by the way that's better than some) and then we are forgiven forever." Now that teaching is or at least has been afloat in our community.

Throughout the book the one Scripture they keep repeating is 1 John 1:9, which says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Here is what he says on page 19, "I must say it surprised every one of us to learn that there is only one Scripture verse in the entire New Testament that deals with confession of sin to God. One of our researchers supplied each of us with a printout from a Bible program in his computer. The printout showed every verse in the Bible where confession of sin was referenced. That conclusive evidence quickly proved that indeed only one verse in the New Testament, 1John 1:9, makes reference to confession of sin to God."

On page 11 he says, "Oh! That every child of God would diligently research all the truth taught by that chosen apostle. They would soon discover that confession of sin, and the possibility of forfeited fellowship on the part of the believer, is totally foreign to the proclaimed rounded-out counsel of God's truth. If there was ever the possibility of believers being severed from our great loving God, we could no more restore it than we could lift ourselves by our own bootstraps."

And so, not only is the doctrine of repentance under attack in our day, the doctrine of confession is as well.

B. Confession

1. Definition

So, our first order of business is to define this word 'confession'. Since 1 John 1:9 has come under question, let us go there to consider this word (read). The word to 'confess' is *homologeō*. It comes from two words, *homo*, meaning the same thing, and *logeō*, meaning to say. It means to say the same thing, or to agree or concede or profess or declare openly.

Now I want you to notice something most carefully. 1 John 1:9 does not say, "If we confess we are sinners..." It says, "If we confess our sins..." There is a vast difference, and the second is immeasurably harder than the first. Those who came to John for baptism did not come confessing they were sinners. If that were the case, John would never have known that the Scribes and Pharisees were not sincere. He would not have known that the Scribes and Pharisees did not have the right kind of fruit. I cannot see other than that confession is the fruit of repentance.

Now, I want to say from my own experience that in my own Christian life, I know of no harder thing to do than to confess my wrongs to the person I have wronged. To confess to God, well, that is not so hard. To confess to the person we have wronged, that is absolutely the hardest thing in the world. But, let me say this, there are few other things that bring greater victory. A. H. Strong, in his theology, when he pointed out the wrong teaching of Catholicism said this, "We are required to confess one to another, and

specifically to those whom we have wronged: James 5:18 - 'Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray for one another that you may be healed.' (Listen to him now) This puts the hardest stress upon our natural pride. There are a hundred who will confess to a priest or to God, where there is one who will make frank and full penitence to the aggrieved party" (834).

When it comes to confession, especially from one who feels superior to the one he or she is to confess to, it comes very hard. Here are some of the things I have heard: "You mean I have to crawl to so and so?" Or, "I have to let myself down that far?" Or, "I have to lie down and let them step all over me?" And then I have heard those things I don't want to repeat. This is how hard confession is. These are the responses of those who have sins pointed out to them and they are resistant to confession. And saying such things is the fullest evidence that such persons have not come to repentance. When a person is truly repentant, all such questions fade into the background and one is more concerned with one's repentance being accepted by the one we have wronged than with anything else.

In true confession, the cross does its most thorough work in us. It is there the self dies a most painful death. Of all things self hates of the cross life, this is probably the one hated the most. Self cringes when it comes to this. Self will do anything to avoid this. It is for this reason that I think some argue that one's sins are forgiven; past, present and future, and confession is not biblical. And yet it is only true confession that brings true liberty.

If you do not agree, try to get out of the prison of guilt without confessing. And if one is talked into not needing to confess, and that conviction is stymied by such a teaching, one becomes numb to sin and is like a man who's physical feelings have died. When acknowledgment and confession need to be urged on someone, that confession, I think, is seldom real.

So, what is confession? It is to verbally say the same thing to the one I have wronged as the thing I did that was wrong. To look at confession another way, it is the fruit of repentance. And what does that look like? Well, let us say I have stolen a tire from my neighbor.

If I repent, I change my mind about what I did. And if I truly repent, the fruit will be going to my neighbor and confessing the sin to him. I will tell him the same thing I did. And that fruit of that repentance will be saying something like this to the one I stole the tire from: "George, on Tuesday night I needed a tire and I saw you had one and you were not home and I stole it. I sinned against you, and I am repenting to you for that. I feel very bad about what I did and I will pay you whatever you wish, and I ask you to forgive me. Will you forgive me for stealing your tire?" You see, repentance is only as true as it is thorough. Repentance is the tree, and the fruit is confession. That, I believe is how John the Baptist knew whom to baptize and whom to send back and now come unless they had the right fruit.

2. Biblical evidence for

Now our question is, does the Bible require confession? Listen to Leviticus 5:4-6, "Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it—when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters. And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin."

So, turn to Numbers 5 (read 6-7), "Speak to the children of Israel: 'When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, 'then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged."

There are numerous passages like this. On Israel's high and holy day, the day of atonement, two goats were sacrificed. The one goat's blood was shed, and the sins of the nation were confessed over the other goat. There is repentance and confession. Now the fruit of repentance, which is confession, is the most humbling,

and the hardest to get out of us proud humans. It is well nigh impossible for God to get us to repent and confess our sins of our own free will. Yet that is the only way to deliverance from sin's guilt. When someone must be told their wrong, unless they are truly ignorant of it, and they repent, it is hard to the repentance was true. The only way you can know it is true is if you can see fruits worthy of repentance.

Then listen to Proverbs 28:13, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

Now, I know that those who insist that confession of sin is not necessary will say this, "Oh, that is the OT. The NT does not teach that." The writer I quoted earlier that claimed that the only verse in the NT that spoke of confessing sin was 1 John 1:9. And he would say, "But those verses are in the OT. That is under the old economy. In the NT it is different. We are to reckon ourselves dead indeed to sin and never need to confess again." Let me say this to such responses: There are a number of things the NT does not spend much time on because it is so thoroughly taught in the OT. Let me give you an example: Creation. And such is also the case with confession. But it is not that the NT does not endorse the OT teaching on confession, as we will see.

So, let us go to the NT. We read Matthew 3:1-6 earlier. Turn there once more. What we must notice carefully here is that those who came to the baptism of repentance came confessing their sins (v. 5-6). Confession goes along with repentance. Where there is true repentance, there will be confession; and where there is no confession, there is no true repentance.

Listen to Mark 1:4-5, "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." So, listen to what that baptism of repentance involved in verse 5, "Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins."

Let me add here that confession, the acknowledgment of the mouth to what was in the heart, did not only

involve confession of sins. For true salvation, there must also be confession of Christ. Jesus said in Luke 12:8, "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God."

Then go to Romans 10 (read 9-10). Here again, confession of Christ is mentioned for salvation. But because repentance and faith are not mentioned, does not mean they were not needed or did not happen. Because there is confession with the mouth of Christ, we would conclude that the other matters had already happened.

Now go to Acts 19 (read 18). Now in this passage repentance is not mentioned, but we can only conclude that if they came confessing their deeds, repentance had already happened.

But, not all passages that require confession use the word confession in the text. For example, Matthew 18 (read 15-17). The one who does not hear does not acknowledge his wrong. The one who hears, of course, must acknowledge his wrong and you cannot do that without confessing it.

Go to Luke 17 (read 1-4). Now, note, if he comes saying, "I repent." How do you know he is truly repentant? Confession, of course. There can be no other answer.

3. Requirement of confession

So, does the Bible require confession when we repent? I think it must be concluded that to be forgiven before God, we must confess our sins to Him. And when we have wronged others, we must confess to them. I think that we often settle for confessing that we are sinners, but the Bible speaks of confessing our sins. The cross does not come into play much in acknowledging we are sinners. But to confess our sins to the one we have wronged, this requires the cross. This is the real difficult thing both in conversion and in ongoing salvation.

Now, the writer, McLeod that I quoted earlier agreed that one must confess one is a sinner in order to be

saved. According to his writing, 1 John 1:9 speaks of those who are getting saved and he agrees that to get saved one must confess one is a sinner. But 1 John 1:9 was not written to the lost, nor does it say we are to confess we are a sinner. It says, "If we confess our sins." There is a vast difference. The requirement is to confess our sins.

Certainly James 1:5 is addressed to believers and it says, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." McLeod argues that the word 'to confess' here is not the regular word for confession. It is *exhomologeo*, not *homologeo*. But the facts are it not only means the same as confess, but it is a strengthened form of *homologeo*. The root word is exactly the same. It is to confess!

So, to answer the question, is confession required in order to receive forgiveness, the answer is yes. There is only one genuine way out of the prison of the conscience, and that is by repentance and confession.

4. What brings about confession

When we looked at repentance, we asked what brings about repentance, and we said it was conviction of sin. When the Holy Spirit of God gets a hold of us, he puts us in the prison of guilt and we cannot get out unless we repent. But when we repent, that is, we change our minds about our actions, then confession becomes necessary in order to get out of the prison of guilt. So, conviction of sin brings about repentance and repentance brings about confession. There is no prison like the prison of guilt. Let me give you the Scripture that gives the most graphic picture of this and you may want to read it for yourself later. It is Matthew 18:23-35.

5. True and false confession

Now, just as there is a true and a false repentance, so there is a true and false confession. True confession is brought about by true repentance. It is open and honest and does not seek to excuse one in any way. It simply and fully acknowledges the wrong and asks for forgiveness. I expect that any confession that begins

with 'if' or continues with 'but' is not a sincere confession.

6. Results

So, what are the results of true confession? Well, the first requirement for forgiveness is repentance. Without a change of mind, no one will consider confession. Repentance is the tree, the fruit of that tree is confession. When a wrong between people is repented of and sincere confession is made, it will bring about joy and freedom and reconciliation. And reconciliation is the end desire or result of repentance and confession, whether it be between man and God or man and fellow man.

7. Counsel for confession

Now, from my years of experience, I know there are all kinds of cases where people do not know what to do about certain sins. It is a rather lengthy topic, but let me give you some brief guidelines for confession.

Ralph Sutera, in a tract called, 'The Road to Confession, Forgiveness, Restitution, and Reconciliation', says, "When the Holy Spirit deals with us, we are made very sensitive to His will and to the wrongs committed against others. There is also an awareness that inward peace results only when such things are dealt with properly." He further says, "Dealing with confession of sins is a very sensitive matter and must be handled delicately, discreetly, and prayerfully, lest the individuals or the cause of Christ be adversely affected." And he then gives some principles on confession that I want to pass on to you.

First of all, all sin is against God and we need to take care of all things with Him. But how do we handle things where we have sinned against others, and I will give you these in point form.

a. Private Sins

The first area Ralph Sutera addresses is private sins. What he means is if one person sins against another. Giving Matthew 5:23-24 he says that if we bring our gift to God and there remember that we

have wronged another, we are to first go and be reconciled to our brother. That, of course, cannot be done without confession. But the key passage he gives here is Matthew 18:15-18, and you are familiar with the passage. First, go to the person alone. If he does not take care of it, go with one or two more. If there is still no positive response, then it needs to become public. Private sins need to be handled privately if possible.

b. Public Sins

The second category he gives is public sins. He writes, "Public sins are those that involve or affect a church congregation, an entire family, etc.. Confession needs to and must be made in public, seeking the forgiveness and restoration of the entire group or family involved. As one's heart is open and ready to obey, God will give discretion and sound judgment in these matters."

c. Personal Sins

The last area Ralph Suter addresses is personal sins. Let me quote again. "Personal sins are those committed in the flesh-life and thought-life. Certainly to harbor unclean lustful habits or thoughts is a sin against God. Matt. 5:27-30 These fiery darts of Satan, Eph. 6:16, may flash through one's mind, but it becomes sin when they are harbored and cherished. This is an area of great danger. One must deal with God on a personal basis concerning any personal fleshly habits. Confession of sin that relates to problems of personal morality and uncleanness should not be shared publically."

So, if a sin happens between two believers, seek to take care of it individually. If the sin takes place publically, take care of it publically. If it is personal, take care of it between you and the Lord. In all points, confession is a requirement, not an option.

CONCL: Well, I want to conclude this section I titled 'Unconditional Forgiveness.' From what is involved in forgiveness and restoration, it is easy to see why we want to

get around this subject. Anyone who wishes to take exception to these matters and feels confession is not necessary may do as he or she wishes. But this I know, no one will find divine spiritual cleansing and freedom who does not deal with sin in the right way. No repentance, no forgiveness. No confession, no forgiveness.

Now, I Have not mentioned one more important matter, the matter of restitution. There are times when restitution is required as well as confession. The example I gave of stealing a tire, is such a case. Restitution goes along with confession. Ralph Sutera said this in the tract I read from before, "What would make people do such things as place \$100.00 in the church offering plate making restitution for a 50 year old unpaid dentist bill, pay the grocer for an unpaid bag of potatoes taken two years previously, return a Master's Degree from University for cheating on examinations, or write the Prime Minister of Canada enclosing a check for unpaid back federal income taxes?"

The passage we read earlier in Numbers 5:6-7, said, "Speak to the children of Israel: 'When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, 'then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged."

When Zacheaus Got saved the day Jesus visited his house, he said, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." So when Zacheaus did restitution, he went far beyond what the OT required.

So, our subject has been forgiveness and for true forgiveness to take place, it requires repentance, confession and restitution when loss of goods is involved. I have heard of those who turned themselves in to the police after they repented and came to faith, because they could get peace no other way.

(With regard to confession: Story of Cariboo? Lying?)