



Confession and Repentance

Review

In the last session we spent time learning the practice of [gazing upon Christ](#).



Have you been able to incorporate [gazing upon Christ](#) into your time with God?

How did that go?

In this session we will cover confession and repentance. These are related to sin and that is where we'll begin.

Sin

Sin. It's a terrible word isn't it? We don't talk about it. Maybe because we don't want to offend people or seem self-righteous. But sin is mentioned in the Bible quite a bit, so it must be important.



What is sin anyway? If you had to describe sin to someone who had never heard that word, what would you tell them?

Let's look at what we can learn from two characters of the Bible: Peter and Moses.

Peter

Peter has a very interesting response to Jesus when they first meet. The topic of sin comes up. Let's read through and see if we can learn something about sin.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

- Luke 5:8

Peter just met Jesus and after getting a glimpse of who Jesus really was, told Jesus to go away from him. Why would Peter say this? Did he actually want Jesus to leave him? Did he think that Jesus should leave him, even though deep down he didn't want that?

His reasoning was because he (Peter) was sinful. What is the connection between sin and being separated from Jesus? Today, Peter's reasoning probably doesn't make much sense to us. That might have something to do with our understanding of sin, and of God's holiness.

Moses

Similarly, Moses had an encounter with God.

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

- Exodus 3:5,6

In this case, it's God speaking to man saying don't come any closer. In effect saying, "There needs to be distance between you and Me." It seems there's a repulsive force between sinful us and our holy God. Let's look at that more closely in the next section.

So regardless of our definition of sin, we can see its effects in Peter and Moses. Sin keeps us apart from God. If we want Christ to dwell in us, something has to happen to overcome the gap that sin creates between us and God.



Have you ever felt distanced from God like Peter and Moses?

After considering these things, has your view of sin changed?

Sin Separates Us From God

We saw the effects of sin in Peter and Moses just now. Sin keeps us apart from God. God is holy, righteous and pure.

There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

- 1 Samuel 2:2

In ourselves naturally, we are not holy or righteous.

Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.

- Ecclesiastes 7:20

So we and God are opposites on the scale of holiness, and in this case opposites do not attract; they repel. Our sin causes God to be separated from us even though he created us to be with him.

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

- Isaiah 59:2



How do we feel when we consider this? Is there any sense of awe of God, or perhaps even fear? Is there any sense that we shouldn't be able to approach him, that we're not worthy enough to be in His presence?

Sin In Us

If we're honest with ourselves, we know that there's sin in us.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
- 1 John 1:8

If God is so concerned about sin and it affects our relationship with him, then it's probably a good idea to know a little of what it is.

In both the Old and New Testaments, the word sin means *to miss the mark*. It means we knew what the goal was, and what we needed to achieve, but we didn't achieve it.

So what's the goal? Well, a simple way of thinking of this is anything and everything that God has shown us about how we should live life. How we live life is not just things we say and do that are observed by others, but includes the thoughts and attitudes in our hearts that people don't see. The Ten Commandments might come to your mind, or maybe Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, or even the concise verse in Micah 6:8 that answers the question "What does God require of us?" by saying "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

You would think we'd be able to nail those few words of Micah, but remember the 1 John verse above as well as Romans 3:23.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- Romans 3:23

We've missed God's mark and continue to miss it.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- 1 John 1:9

If we want Christ to dwell in us, something has to happen to overcome the gap that sin creates between us and God.



What is needed to overcome this sin gap?

The Cross

Jesus' death on the cross closes the sin gap between us and God. It brings us forgiveness as Christ Himself said at the last supper.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."
- Matthew 26:28

It is the only way we can come to God.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

- John 14:6

This is what God did for us in Christ. But that isn't the end of the story. We still have a role to play.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

- John 3:16

It is when we believe in the amazing work of Christ on the cross for us that the deal is sealed, so to speak.

If you have come this far in the series, you probably know all about this. But if it is new for you and you do believe in the overwhelming love God has shown us in Jesus, now would be a great time to slow down and talk to God about that.

The Cost of Forgiveness

Tim Keller in his book "Prayer" speaks of the mutual costliness and freeness of forgiveness. We probably all understand the freeness in that we don't have to do anything to pay for God's forgiveness. But do we understand the costliness?

Keller goes on to reference Martin Lloyd Jones who points out that sins are like debts that need to be paid for in God's economy. We have missed God's mark by so much and the debt is so great that it requires an infinite payment. The only way it could be paid was by God himself who is infinite in numerous ways. The Father sent the Son to pay that debt through his costly death on the cross. It cost the Father and Son to an extent we may never understand when Jesus cried out on the cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" If we can begin to understand how costly our forgiveness was to God, it can make a big difference in how we interact with God when we confess our sins to him.

Confession

So we have talked about sin. We have talked about God's holiness and our separation from Him due to sin. And we have talked about the cross and forgiveness. Surely that covers everything. Well, there is this thing of confession.

David is an awesome guy. He loved God so much and was so expressive about that. We referenced the Psalms he wrote when we talked about [praise and worship](#), and we'll reference him here talking about sin, confession and repentance. He was called a man after God's own heart because he was blessed to have a proper understanding of the fullness of God. That's what we're seeking - a full heart revelation of the fullness of God in Jesus.

Burden of the Heart

David knew the burden on his heart when he didn't confess.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
- Psalm 32:3,4

In the verses right after that, we see that burden led him to confess.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.
- Psalm 32:5

Who We Sin Against

When David sinned, he said,

Against you, you only, have I sinned.
- Psalm 51:4

He most likely was aware of and regretted how his sin hurt people. However, he understood that God was the one he sinned against, and that knowledge changes things completely.

When we know it's against God and God only that we sin, and we remember the great cost that Jesus paid for our sin on the cross, it can make us hate the sin in much the same way that God does. This hating of sin goes beyond guilt and on to a stronger emotion that will result in action; a God-pleasing change in behavior. Then we are in a better position to repent or turn our back on our sin.

Confession Outcomes

In 1 John, we start to understand the outcomes of confession.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- 1 John 1:9

That's an amazing message. When we confess our sins, God both forgives us and purifies us.



What has been your experience of Confession in your personal times with God so far?

Repentance

That turning our back on sin mentioned above is repentance. Repentance comes from the Greek *Metanoia* (μετάνοια). It means to change our heart, mind and actions.

Early on in Jesus' time on earth he told people to repent.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

- Matthew 4:17

According to 2 Timothy, repentance is actually a gift from God. Notice the word *grant* in the text below.

Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

- 2 Timothy 2:25

When we hate our sin like we saw earlier, and take steps of changing our actions, this is evidence that God is giving us the gift of repentance.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

- 2 Corinthians 7:10

Practice

In this section, let's see what it means to develop the practice of considering God's holiness contrasted against our own sin. If you're in a group, this is not intended to be a time of confessing out loud to each other. As a group, we're learning this practice to take into our personal times with God. So as we continue through the sections below, our interaction is with God. We just happen to be doing this together in a group setting to learn the practice.

God's Holiness

Scripture gives many great images of the holiness of God. Slowly read through the verse below from Isaiah.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

- Isaiah 6:1-3

This verse gives a picture of God as high and separate from all else, with his holiness affecting these angelic beings to their core. Let's take time now to meditate on the holiness of God as portrayed in this verse.



Pause for ~2 minutes to meditate on God's holiness.

Our Sinfulness

The apostle Paul said that he was the worst sinner.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

- 1 Timothy 1:15

If Paul said this, certainly we are in the same position to say it.

Romans makes it pretty clear that there isn't a single person who is without sin.

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

- Romans 3:11-12

⏸ Pause for ~2 minutes to meditate on our sinfulness.

Personal confession and reflection

Let's think about particular areas of our life. When we look inside, we can see sin in many different areas of our lives. Let's start with something that's common to many of us: how we think of other people. When we judge others, even though it's something in our minds that nobody else may know about, we fall short of God's plan for us. Sometimes this doesn't just stay in our minds as shown in James.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.

- James 3:9

Take a moment to think if there is anyone you judge. Consider the person or people affected by your sin. Remember that they are God's creation and he loves them as much as he loves you.

⏸ Pause for ~2 minutes to consider this.

If judging others isn't an issue for you at the moment, you can use this prayer from the Psalms to ask God what, if anything, you should bring before Him now.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

- Psalm 139:23-24

- II Take a few moments to see if God shows you something.

Whatever God has put on your heart, whether it's judging someone or something else, let's take that a bit further.

Consider that it is against God that we are sinning. Stay with this awhile. You may get to a point where you feel quite upset that you've done this to God. It's good to be repulsed and to hate the sin so that you not only *want* to turn away from it, but you *do* turn away from it.

- II Take a couple of minutes with this.

The Cross and Forgiveness

It is spiritually healthy for us to remember our sinfulness and confess our sin to God. When we are honest with God about our general sinfulness and specific sins, his grace and mercy will often remind us of the amazing forgiveness He has given us through Christ's death on the cross. So, let's continue on to consider how our sins have been forgiven through Christ's death on the cross.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

- Ephesians 1:7,8

Meditate on this verse before God. Think of the use of the word *riches* to describe God's grace in the blood of Christ for us. Think of the verb *lavish* used to describe the extent of his grace towards us through the cross. Nothing is spared or held back in lavishing. Keep these thoughts rolling over in your mind before God.

Now move into praise and worship in the context of this verse.

Sample Praise: Father, your grace is most obvious to me in the gift of your Son Jesus. His death is your gift to me. His blood is your gift to me. The precious blood of your eternal Son is what makes your gift rich. You have held nothing back from us in your giving. You gave the one thing that you love and value the most; your own Son.

From Romans we can see that this gracious forgiveness is given to all who have faith in Jesus.

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

- Romans 3:21,22

Let's take time now to re-affirm our faith in the work of Christ for us on the cross.

Sample Praise: Jesus, through your sacrificial gift of your own life on the cross, I have been made right. I have been brought back to the Father because of your blood that was shed. He sees me in a new way because of you. I believe this as much or more than I believe in the existence of the physical objects I can see before myself now. This is true. This is the reality that you have made. My heart overflows with thanks that you have made this my reality.

Developing the Practice

Now spend some time alone in confession and repentance. If you're in a group, separate out to find your own quiet spot to be alone with God. Go through the steps that we just discussed.

1. Meditation on God's holiness
2. Meditation on our sinfulness
3. Meditation on the cost of forgiveness through the cross
4. Confession
5. Repentance
6. Meditation on and praise and worship for forgiveness

Feel free to use the scriptures, notes and sample meditations and praises from the earlier section.

Take about 15 minutes. If you are doing this in a group, come back together and discuss how things went.

Tomorrow in your time with God, set aside a part of that time for confession and repentance. From there on, you might decide to use this practice every time when you spend time with God or, maybe once a week, your entire time with God might be focused on confession and repentance. May Christ dwell in our hearts and may we know the fullness of His love as we come before Him in confession and repentance.