

Our Walk Out of Darkness Into the Light

Fellowship and Confession of Sin

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The Days of Unleavened Bread picture God's people—the church—putting away sin and striving to obey God's commandments. Paul tells us that we are to keep this feast, not with old leaven—that is, sinful habits—or with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Leaven is a biblical symbol for sin, as you well know. It represents such things as hypocrisy and false teachings and puffs up like vanity.

Egypt is also a biblical symbol for sin. The Israelites left Egypt the first night of the Days of Unleavened Bread—a special Night to be Much Observed throughout all generations. When they left Egypt, they left at night and came out of darkness. After accepting Christ's sacrifice for our sins, we must leave spiritual Egypt: we must leave the sins of this world. It is easy to see that we are in a conflict between good and evil. The issue at hand is the conflict between sin and righteousness, rebelliousness and submission, lawlessness and order, darkness and light, separation and fellowship. All of those are contrasting ideas.

Although the biblical truth about sin is easy to define, a tangled web of misconceptions about sin is woven into confusion in this world. Some believe that there is no such thing as sin. Others feel that sin is not sin unless the act in question "hurts someone." We know that all sin does, but people who do not understand sin do not understand that basic truth. Some think that is it not sin unless it is against some sort of personal code, and then we get into some human reasoning over what is good and what is evil. Others include almost any and everything under the definition of sin, such as movies or even wearing any type of clothing. We know that there are groups of people in this nation who will only wear black, and those that are the very conservative of that group will only pin their clothes together rather than use buttons. We see the extremes of ideas in this world having to do with sin. Others divide sin into various categories such as "original," "mortal," and "venial" sins.

When it comes to understanding the doctrine of sin, the bible spends a great deal of time on it in very concise terms. For example, scripture leaves no doubt about the definition of sin.

I John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

As the King James Version translates it, "sin is the transgression of the law." In other words, sin is the breaking of God's law. This statement that sin is lawlessness goes a long way to refute the many deceptions that there is no sin or that sin is only sin when it hurts someone or breaks our personal preferences.

However, sin in this context means much more than a letter of the law defiance of one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus expanded the law of God to include not only lawlessness but also

breaking the spirit and intent of the law. It includes everything that is not righteous, since I John 5:17 states, "All unrighteousness is sin."

In spite of the importance of understanding what sin is and what it does, the actual biblical teaching about sin is easy to summarize. Sin is rebellion against the way of God as defined by God's perfect law. Although the penalty of sin is death, forgiveness is willingly given by God to those who repent and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and who continue in God's way of life and continue to overcome sin.

One of the things that sin does is to separate us from God. It causes God to turn a deaf ear to us.

I saiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

This separation is a kind of disfellowshipping, if there were any fellowship with Him to begin with. Fellowship is a position in which two people are walking together along the road; it is a journey, a companionship, a friendship. You remember that Enoch walked with God. That means he had fellowship with God. You see two people walking together down the road or a husband and wife going together through life, walking through a journey. There is only happiness if there is agreement. A Christian is one who in that way is walking with God, who is living God's way of life.

In regard to that kind of fellowship, we have at least two things to do. First, we have to know something about the character of the two persons who are taking part in that fellowship. That is why John begins, in I John 1:5, with a fundamental fact about fellowship. John reminds us of the essential nature and character of God. If we are interested in knowing something about this fellowship and understanding what it means, if we want it to develop and continue to endure, then we have to start with a true understanding of the character of God.

The apostle John had been three and a half years with Jesus. He wrote under Jesus' inspiration, and this is a message directly from Christ:

I John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and
declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

God is light. That is a major part of His character. We reflect God's character when we live our lives the way that He wants us to. There is no darkness in God at all; there is utter, absolute holiness, without flaw, without any evil or sin.

Beginning in verse 6, John tells us about the other things to do with regard to this type of fellowship. It is important that we should know the character of God, but we must also know something about ourselves.

I John 1:6-10 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in
darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

We have the Days of Unleavened Bread to very seriously and very deeply analyze our lives. We look at ourselves and try to dig out that sin that is within us, those secret sins that we do not see on the surface. The word *we* in the above scripture refers to true Christians. In the next chapter, he speaks of non-Christians:

I John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

John's language is pretty plain here. He is talking about those who are in darkness as opposed to the true Christians about whom he talks in I John 1:6-10. He is warning us not to walk in darkness, as the world does.

If we profess to be Christians—if we say we have fellowship "with the Father and Jesus Christ"—yet if we are living in darkness—if our lives are going the way of sin—we are liars. John is not talking about one who, under temptation, commits an act of sin and then repents. We should be regularly repenting when we realize that we have committed a sin. He is talking directly about those followers of the false teachers who teach that God's law is done away. If we say we are Christian because we believe in Christ or worship Christ yet do not keep His commandments, we walk in darkness. A person walking in darkness, then, does not have any fellowship with Christ; and if he claims to be a Christian, he is a liar.

The apostle John does not stop at merely considering our character and what must be true of us; he also deals with the limitations and imperfections that are in us. This is for what we are looking during these Days of Unleavened Bread, more seriously, possibly, than the rest of the year—although we should be looking for those imperfections all year round. We are given an opportunity to remember that we are to come out of sin, to come out of darkness.

In mainstream pseudo-Christianity, there is a common, deep-seated objection to the whole doctrine of sin, and along with that goes the view of life which maintains that things are not quite as bad as the Bible and the theologians in the past have made it out to be. It seems that some people who come out of the world when called still hang on to the false belief that as long as we do our best and look to God occasionally for a little help, then everything will be all right. They do not take these sins too seriously. They believe that to be a Christian is to be as decent as we can be and to do good and so on, expecting a certain amount automatically coming from God. They say their prayers and attend an occasional Sabbath service and go on as usual. This is the problem issue with which John deals in these verses. John divides the subject of fellowship and sin into three similar but distinct phrases. Those phrases are found in verses 6, 8

and 10

I John 1:6, 8, 10 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth...If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

John teaches here that there are three common errors with regard to sin, and it is because we go wrong in these three main respects that so many of us fail to enjoy and experience fellowship with God and Jesus Christ to the fullest. If we are only trying to be just a little bit better than some reckless, willful sinner or to be a little bit better than we once were or to be decent and moral—or even if we are only trying in a general and vague way to adhere to the teaching and doctrines of Jesus Christ and the church—that is not enough. We are to be doers of the word not just hearers, "if we say that we have fellowship with Him"! It is not enough just to think about those things; we have to have action. We have to actively repent and obey.

The first thing that comes between us and intimate, glorious fellowship with God is the failure to realize the nature of sin in general. We cannot claim we have fellowship with God and continue to walk in darkness. John bluntly tells us that such is a lie. If we say one thing and do another, it is a lie. He then goes on to say that if that is the case, the truth is not in us—we do not tell the truth. We have to understand our nature, our human reasoning, and realize that we do not always tell ourselves the truth. We have a tendency, at times, to deceive ourselves.

People who are guilty of that have obviously not understood the real nature of sin. John says in verse 6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness..." We see there a contrast, because we know that God is light, but if we are walking in darkness how can we be fellowshiping and obeying in friendship with God? The apostle John is not talking about an act of sin, repented of, but about an attitude and a life of continually living in sin. That is doing the same sin, over and over and over again, for weeks, months and years.

We must, as a continuous way of life, "walk in the light," that is, the way of obeying God's commandments. Then we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. Walking in darkness—or, in other words, walking in sin—is the result of a kind of citizenship in a kingdom. It is promoted by an environment, an atmosphere, or a dominion, like a kingdom. We are required to be citizens of heaven, citizens of God's Kingdom, ambassadors of God's way of life. How can we be ambassadors or citizens if we are walking in darkness? The obvious answer is that we cannot.

God's inspired written Word reveals that there are these two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of holiness and the kingdom of evil and wickedness. There is a direct contrast between these two kingdoms; they are exact opposites. As it stands now, there are two dominions that have existed since Lucifer rebelled against God. Since then, Satan's dominion of sin and evil has been driven by pride and perversion. It represents an attitude, an outlook, a mindset, even an atmosphere. Even before any of us were born, sin existed in Satan and the fallen angels.

Sin is the root of all our ills and troubles and sorrows. God made a perfect world, but then another element—sin—entered, and the whole earth became polluted. The rulers of darkness promote this attitude of enmity toward God, blinding people into working disobedience. People go willingly into this slavery of the heart and mind.

11 Corinthians 4:4 Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

Ephesians 2:2 In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We see what we are up against during these Days of Unleavened Bread. Our fight is against the powers of darkness, our own human nature, and the world. There is a great clash between the forces of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. All of us born into this world are born under the domination of this kingdom of darkness. As we are by nature, we tend to think and live that way, unless we have God's Holy Spirit and come out of it. This week, we are coming out of Egypt; we are coming out of darkness; and we are coming out of sin.

The kingdom of darkness—in other words, "walking in darkness"—represents everything that is opposed to God and His holiness and perfection, everything that is opposed to His desire, His pleasure, and His will for us.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

We realize as we go through this week of the Days of Unleavened Bread that we need God's help to rid our lives of that sin.

"Walking in darkness" means that you live in such a way that you rarely have any thought about God at all; and if you do think about Him, you do not think of Him as light in whom there is no darkness at all. People think of Him as some benign fatherly person who is ready to smile on their failures and overlook their willful transgressions. That is walking in darkness: the failure to realize that the outlook of humanity is opposed to God, that godlessness is in power and ruling, and that it dominates everything. The apostle John describes this in detail.

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Most people do not stop to think about whether what they think or do is of the Father or of the world. They are walking totally oblivious to all of these things and do not take any interest in them because they do not think any of it affects their lives. They walk in darkness, and they are blind as a result.

People have a tendency to put most of their focus on the external sinful action. However, according to the Bible, that is an inadequate view of sin. From the very beginning, it has been known that acts have effects: for every action there is a reaction, not only in the external world of things and of people, but also on the inner person who commits the act. Because of this, we find throughout the scriptures that there is an emphasis on the idea of the sinful act as not only a fact in itself but also that it reveals an evil moral fiber on the part of the person who commits the act. Very early in scripture it is emphasized that sin comes from deep down inside us—from the heart. Genesis 6: 5 describes what God saw: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." What is obvious about these people is that they are not in fellowship with God. It is entirely impossible because there is a distinct inequality, as the apostle Paul writes:

II Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

Paul tells us why there should be no such improper connection with the world. The main reason is that there can be no fellowship, no communion, nothing in common between them; and, therefore, that they should be separate. Remember, sin separates us from God.

The word *fellowship*—*metochee* in the Greek—means "partnership, participation." What is there in common, or how can the one participate with the other? The interrogative form here is designed to be emphatic and to declare in the strongest terms that there can be no such partnership. The principle Paul is conveying here is not limited to marriage. It is a far-reaching code of behavior that applies to close friendships of all types. It concerns where and with whom a person goes for recreation and entertainment; it relates to partnerships in business and commercial transactions and professional engagements; it regards scientific and literary joint ventures.

We cannot mix light and darkness. Some things are essentially incompatible. Someone whose whole outlook on life is governed by worldliness and who thinks only in human terms from a perspective that is driven by the pride of life cannot be walking along the same strait and narrow path with God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. It is just absolutely impossible.

The first essential principle is recognizing this whole doctrine about sin as a domination, as a power, and as a spiritual contamination and pollution in the world; for if we do not, then we cannot be in fellowship with God, because we will not be in the right frame of mind. We must always be fighting the ways of this world, the way that Satan has influenced the world to be.

The apostle John tells us that we not only have to regard fellowship with God intellectually—that is, through thought, mental exercise, contemplation, motivation—but we must also practice it.

I John 1:1 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

God does what He is. God not only is light, but He acts as light, as well; and the same thing should apply to us. We really show what we are by what we do. We reveal our beliefs in our practice, and those who have not realized the truth about sin cannot have real fellowship and spiritual union with God.

Here is the second message:

I John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The second failure not realizing that our very natures are disposed to sin. We have God's Holy Spirit, and that is why we should not be living in a way of sin and that sin should happen only occasionally in our lives. John's emphasis here is not as much on the actual acts of sin—which in and of themselves are evil—but on the nature that produces the acts of sin. He is concerned about the state that is both the cause and the consequence of what we do: the tendency to sin as a continuous source of influence within us.

Keep in mind that, at the end of the first century A.D., John was constantly combating heresy. One such heresy was that of Gnosticism. We hear a lot about that lately because we are seeing Gnosticism rising in Christian religions around the world today.

There were people who argued that if we have become Christians, we have been delivered from our sinful nature and have received a new nature; therefore, because we have received this new nature, there is no sin in us. They reason that if we do something wrong, it is not we who have sinned; the sin is merely in the flesh. Hence, the heresy known as antinomianism, which means that as long as you are a Christian and claim you know God in Christ, it is immaterial what you do, because you do not sin; it is the flesh or the body that sins. This is a deception that is being promoted in mainstream Christianity today.

That is the view that John was countering, but it is still fairly common, because people will persist in regarding the matter from the standpoint of action rather than from the point of view of the nature within us that produces the action. This is why John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We must recognize that we do sin, and we must do something about it. For someone to say in this way that he does not have a sinful nature is self-deception. This is the person who blames everyone else or his environment for his own sinful nature. Each individual is responsible for his own thoughts and actions. Our own human nature or human reasoning will reason that it is not our fault or that we did not do anything wrong, that it was the other person. Sometimes we tend to do that as brethren.

It is not simply a question of whether we have committed actions that are wrong but why did

we do it? What led us to do it? What is it in us that made us think of it and play with the suggestion to do it? There is really only one answer: There is something wrong within us; our nature is sinful. Even though we may try to do the right things, it is impossible without God's Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us. The apostle Paul struggled with the same thing, and he writes about it in Romans 7:

Romans 7:15-24 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Only God the Father and Jesus Christ can deliver us, and that is why they give us Their Holy Spirit and why Jesus Christ is in us as true Christians.

Verse 18 says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." We struggle with this, especially during the Days of Unleavened Bread, when it is emphasized to us that it is a struggle. That is why we deleaven our homes, and then realize during the week how hard it was to get rid of that leaven out of our lives. It is almost inevitable, although maybe not every year, that we find leaven somewhere that we were sure that we had eradicated, just as we are sure that we got rid of our sin. As David said, "Please, God, show us our secret sins."

If we say that we have no sin, we are deliberately deceiving ourselves. How often do we actually deceive ourselves? We can be so very clever about justifying our own thoughts and actions; but when it comes to the actions of others, we see right through what they are doing. Quite often, we are very quick to point the finger.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

We see that our battle, this week especially, is against ourselves, our own hearts. Those who look at themselves and face themselves know that this is true about human nature, that at the center we are wrong. Our nature is evil and sinful, and not to admit that is self-deceit. Not only that, but the truth is not in us. The truth is something that enlightens us, as Paul tells us:

Ephesians 5:13 "But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light."

Jesus made a similar point earlier, when He said,

John 3:19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

As I said before, we are coming out of the darkness as the children of Israel came out of darkness, sin, and evil when they left Egypt. This brings us to the last point in:

I John 1:10 "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

In other words, "If we Christians say that we have not sinned." This is the failure to realize that we, even as occasional sinners, need forgiveness. We have all sinned and need forgiveness.

John says that if your attitude is that you do not sin, "you make Him a liar, and His word is not in you." If we do not realize that we sin and need the forgiveness of God, if we think that we are perfect Christians, if we do not realize that we must repent, then we are calling God a liar, because ~~the~~*Him* referred to in this verse is God the Father Himself. Paul states the issue succinctly in two verses in Romans 3.

Romans 3:10, 23 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

To be wrong about sin leads to this result: It means that we are still walking in darkness, that our attitude is based on a lie. If we say, "I am a Christian," and people know that we profess to be one yet continue to walk in darkness, we are liars, pretending to be something we are not. If this is the case, we are lying to and deceiving ourselves. One of the lessons that we learn during the Days of Unleavened Bread is how easily we miss that leaven and how easy it is to deceive ourselves that it is even there. That is one of the reasons not to have someone else clean all of your leaven out, on a regular basis, anyway. If you are delegating it to somebody else, where is your action in that? Where have you changed?

I John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

John is not talking about automatically forgiving the sins of the people in the world. He is explaining that Jesus Christ's sacrifice makes it legally possible and consistent with God's

character and government to pardon people when they repent of sin.

I John 2:3-4 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

In verse 3, John shows how we Christians know if we know Him: if we keep His commandments, if that is our way of life, our attitude, desire, and intention twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We may stumble and fall down once in a while along the way, but our walk is in the light because we live God's way of life as our way of life. We can live God's way of life and still occasionally commit sin; but we had better be very quick to repent of it, because sin separates us from God and hurts and even destroys the fellowship that we want to have with Him. In verse 4, John talks about the false Christians. They do not keep God's commandments yet profess to be saved by grace.

I John 1:7-9 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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It affects not only our fellowship with God, but it affects our fellowship as brethren. If we sin, we not only separate ourselves from God, but we also separate ourselves from each other.

Twice he talks about cleansing. The word *cleanse* in verse 7 is from the original Greek word *katharizo*, which is in the Greek aorist, or present continuous, tense. It does not say that the blood of Christ *did cleanse* us when we were first converted; rather, it *does now* cleanse us who were in the past converted. It is a continuous implication.

Verse 8 is clear that "if we who are already Christians say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The grammatical tense here is important again. John does not say, "If we Christians say we did not sin, before we were forgiven and converted..." He is not talking about past sins, committed before repentance and conversion. Those sins God has forgiven in the past. He is speaking here of the present: "If we—now—say that we now have no sin..."

Verse 9 speaks of any sins a Christian may commit after he has been converted. If we confess and repent, Jesus, our High Priest, alive in heaven, will forgive, and more, cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Not only do we want the forgiveness but we want that cleansing, the internal cleaning.

Psalms 119:172 says that righteousness is keeping all of God's commandments. Unrighteousness is transgressing one or more of God's commandments. If we who are already Christians confess and repent of any sin we might, unhappily, commit—though we certainly should not sin—the living Christ will not only forgive but also cleanse us from doing it anymore! That is, provided

that we work at it, that we work with Jesus Christ in keeping that out of us.

I would like to take a look at this idea of confession of sin. In criminal proceedings, a confession is a document in which a suspect admits to having committed a crime. Confession of sins is an important part of our walk with God. The meaning is essentially the same as the secular criminal one: "to admit one's own guilt."

In the Old Testament, confession is not only the genuine expression of a contrite heart but also a requirement for receiving forgiveness. In his psalm about the joy of forgiveness, David does not try to hide his sin but admits it with repentance and receives God's mercy and grace in the way of forgiveness.

Psalm 32:5 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 of my sin. Selah.

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

One of the most outstanding chapters in the Old Testament is Psalm 51. This psalm contains the actual words of confession expressed by King David after his great sins of adultery and murder described in II Samuel 11. David's prayer is an excellent pattern for repentance and forgiveness of sin. The first step is that David begins his prayer by freely admitting his sin.

Psalm 51:3-4 For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

This honesty is vital in our confession. God will graciously forgive all our sins but not on account of our excuses. The wicked hide themselves and try to justify their sins, but the righteous both admit and forsake their sins. This honesty that David shows here is the state of being honorable or truthful, upright and fair in the way that we deal with others. In general, honesty stands for righteous character, integrity, decency, purity.

In the New Testament, "confess" occurs occasionally to express acknowledgement of sin.

James 5:16 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.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Matthew 5:23-24 "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to

your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Luke 17:4 "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

Part of our confession of our own sin is to forgive others of their infractions against us. How can we go to God and confess our sins and ask for repentance if we have things hanging over our heads against someone else? Maybe they have done something against us or maybe it is only perceived. We must forgive others.

In James 5:16, we are told to confess our sins one to another. The sins that James is speaking of are sins against God as well as sins against one another. However, the confession referred to is not to any official of the church—much less to an official with the self-proclaimed power of granting absolution, as in the Catholic Church—but a mutual unburdening of the heart of brethren in the church so that we can pray for one another. The reason for that confession to one another is so that they can pray and help you with overcoming.

The second step for repentance and forgiveness of sin is that David displays real sorrow over his sin. Real confession involves real repentance.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

We see the attitude in which we have to go to God: a broken spirit and a contrite heart. The apostle Paul writes in II Corinthians that the main characteristic of true confession is godly sorrow. He distinguishes two kinds of sorrow: one a godly and the other a worldly sorrow.

II Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Sorrow inevitably follows sin and is a large part of its punishment. True sorrow is the genuine effect of a broken spirit and a contrite heart. It is a true repentant attitude, necessary for the development of good character following sin.

Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

When we sin, we must have a genuine sorrow and repentant attitude.

Sorrow may be allowable under a sense of sin and when involved in troubles, but we have to beware of an extreme. Sorrow becomes sinful and excessive

- when it leads us to become obsessed with ourselves,
- when it distracts us from a proper relationship with God,

- when it causes us to neglect our families,
- when it so oppresses us that we neglect taking proper care of ourselves in such a way that endangers our health and lives or the lives of others,
- when it makes our attitudes bitter or discontented,
- when it makes us inattentive to the instructions of God's Word and to the advice of our friends.

It is possible for people to get into wrong sorrows. In order to be sensible in our sorrows, we should consider that we are under the direction of a wise and merciful Being who does not allow any evil to come upon us without a wise and beneficial design. He can make our troubles sources of spiritual benefit. God can work with us more easily when we are genuinely repentant and sorrowful.

We have to consider that He could have afflicted us in a far greater degree. Although He may have taken away some comforts, He has left many others. The attitude we should have when we are in a trial and are learning lessons is that we know that we will come out of it with a higher level of long-lasting joy and that we will have been perfected or completed even more in the way of getting rid of sin.

The third step for repentance and forgiveness of sin is that David asks God's forgiveness.

Psalms 51:1, 7-9 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions....Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

In order for God to forgive sin, two conditions are necessary: A life must be taken as a substitute for that of the sinner, and the sinner must call upon Jesus Christ's sacrifice in a spirit of repentance and faith.

Mark 1:4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Forgiveness has a prerequisite on our part: genuine repentance of the sin. Repentance is a change of mind and attitude, a change from our fleshly attitude of hostility toward God, of rebellion against God's Law, to the opposite attitude of love, submission, obedience, and proper worship of God and reliance on Him. It is a complete turnaround in attitude and intent to the way of God's righteousness. Repentance means that we come to really see ourselves as we truly are, as God sees us, as a self-centered and hostile little being. It means to be so sorry, not only for what we have done, but also for what we are. When we so abhor ourselves that we go before God, emotionally broken up, throwing ourselves on God's mercy, asking His forgiveness and redemption, and determined to overcome the sin, then we are repentant. Repentance takes a lot of contemplation and mental work, signifying wanting to be made

righteous. It means a total change of attitude and heart, a continuously repentant attitude. God's Spirit will dwell only in this state of mind.

Forgiveness is directly linked to Christ, His sacrificial death on the stake, and His resurrection. He was the morally perfect sacrifice, the final and ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament sacrifices. Since He bore the law's death penalty against sinners, those who trust in, have faith in His sacrifice and repent are by God's grace freed from that penalty. Forgiveness has the effect that results in the complete removal of all separation between God and man. It restores completely the relationship that existed prior to the sin. The total removal of the sin means that God puts it behind Him and out of sight with regard to it carrying the death penalty.

Isaiah 38:17 But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, or You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

Micah 7:19 He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Jeremiah 31:34 "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Isaiah 43:25 "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins."

Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Those are encouraging scriptures about the result of our coming totally out of sin. He not only cleanses us but He also puts our sins behind His back.

For God to be a wise God, able to continue working with us, I do not think that He totally blocks it out of His mind as far as never remembering again. If He did not remember a certain sin and we committed it again, how could He build on what He has already done with us? He does remember what He has already done to work with us having to do with that sin. What He does not do is remember the sin in the way that it holds the death penalty over us any more. It is total forgiveness. This is one of the reasons that we keep the Passover each year: to remind us that it is that total forgiveness of our sins.

Forgiveness is always contingent upon the fulfillment of conditions. It must be preceded by repentance and a conscientious determination not to repeat the offense, and it comes when we conform to God's precepts, statutes, and laws. Obedience and submission to God show that our state of mind is ready to receive God's mercy. This conformity should not be regarded in any sense as an earning of forgiveness; forgiveness is a gift from God, made possible by the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is an act of pure grace on God's part, and obedience and submission are required as expressions of our attitude toward God. The state of mind required in order to obtain the gift of forgiveness is the same attitude to which the prodigal son came:

Luke 15:17-19 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I

perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.""

The same attitude of submission and humility is seen in that of the sinner who went to his house justified rather than the Pharisee, because he realized that forgiveness was to him an act of pure favor.

Luke 18:9-14 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The word *justify* means "to declare or treat as righteous." In this case, it means that in their prayers the humble, contrite tax collector was approved and the proud unrepentant Pharisee was not. The humble one went down to his house with the favor of God in answer to his requests; the proud one did not.

The fourth step for repentance and forgiveness of sin is faith in God, that He is merciful and graceful. David had faith that God had heard him and would restore him.

Psalms 51:12-15 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

Faith is necessary to our salvation because it shows confidence in God's will. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed. God is light. If we have enmity toward God, we walk in darkness; if we have faith in God, that is, personal commitment to Him, we will walk in the light. Light and darkness cannot walk together.

Mere intellectual agreement to a truth is illustrated in James 2:19, where even demons are said to believe that there is one God. Obviously, they are not saved by this type of belief. Personal

commitment faith is a personal attachment to God the Father and Jesus Christ, a combination of reliance on God and Christ and commitment to them.

The result of Jesus' life and crucifixion is forgiveness of our sins and a new relationship with God. Through Jesus, the friendship or fellowship that should always have existed between man and God but that sin interrupted is made possible.

Acts 10:43 "To Him [Christ] all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Believing in Him means faithfully accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, relying on Him in full confidence that the sacrifice of His own life for us is altogether sufficient to pay the penalty of our sins. We must rely on Him completely to help us not to sin and to give us salvation, righteousness, and eternal life.

When we receive God's Holy Spirit, we have received the very life of God—but that does not make us, as yet, inheritors of eternal life. We are not yet immortal. We are then heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. We are begotten children of God, not yet Spirit-born; that is, an heir, not yet a possessor or inheritor. We are still mortal flesh and blood, not yet composed of spirit. As long as God's Holy Spirit dwells in us, we remain heirs of God, later to inherit and share with Christ all the abundance that the Father has to offer.

In the New Testament, the most important single verse concerning confession is in I John. In essence, John tells us that the means of forgiveness and cleansing is the blood of Christ, while the method of this forgiveness and cleansing is our confession.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

By confession, we are forgiven and restored to fellowship. Were it not for Christ's finished work on the stake and His present intercession in heaven, the least sin would result in our permanent banishment from God's presence and eternal ruin. Like David, we must admit our sin, regret the actions of our sin, plead for the blood of Christ, and believe that God has indeed done what He promised: namely, to cleanse us from sin and restore us to fellowship and service. Our responsibility from that time on is to serve God and overcome sin, Satan, our own human nature, and the world.

True faith and true repentance are not separate or to be distinguished too rigidly from each other. Faith is fundamental, and repentance implies faith. Faith is not personal commitment faith unless it includes repentance. Personal commitment faith, for those who have the light of the gospel, is belief in God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and leads us to submit completely to the authority of the Father and Christ and to put complete and exclusive trust in them for salvation.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have

everlasting life.

This is the highest expression of love. A parent who would give up his only son to die for others who are guilty would show higher love than could be manifested in any other way. It shows the depth of the love of God that He was willing to give His only Son into the hands of sinful men for Him to be crucified and in this way redeem them from the final death.

If we are to receive the gift of eternal life and become members of God's Family, we must prove our willingness to obey God here and now by striving to get the spiritual leavening of sin out of our lives. This is our part in God's plan of salvation, as pictured by the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

We are to renew our resolve to live in harmony with God's laws from now on, to rededicate our lives to continual spiritual growth. This is why we are in the process of walking out of that darkness into the light. We want to be totally in the light and we can only do that if we work hard, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, to rid our lives of this sin.