



“Confessing Our Sins”

Part I

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Welcome to the program. This is “Let the Bible Speak,” a program where we allow the word of God to speak about the issues that confront us today. Sin is one of those issues. Sin affects us all, and the only remedy for sin is for God to forgive it. There is nothing that will make right the wrongs of sin besides God’s forgiveness. Since sin is the breaking of God’s law (**I John 3:4**), sin must be dealt with on God’s term, not ours. He is the offended party, not us. And the first step in repentance and reconciliation is to agree with what God says about our sin.

The word *confess* in our English Bible comes from the Greek word *homologeō*, which means *to say the same thing*. So, if God declares that some behavior is wrong, we must be able to admit that we are guilty of what God has called wrong before He will forgive us. We must admit that we are guilty in His sight. Without excuse, alibi, or rationalization, we must be willing to fully agree with God about our sin. Pride so often keeps us from being willing to do that. We admit that we sin, but with the caveat of not identifying the actual sin or blaming someone or something else in the process. But that’s not what God means when He demands that we confess our sins to Him.

We have a powerful example in the Old Testament of Ezra the priest, the representative of God’s people and the scribe who confessed the sins of Israel to God. It is recorded in **Ezra 9**.

Ezra 9:5-10 “And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little

reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments..."

There are some lessons that we all need to learn from this; lessons about how God looks at our sin and how we should look at it as well. We'll talk about Ezra's confession and how we should confess our sins in our study today.

The people of Israel in Ezra's time had committed a grave sin before God: they had intermarried with unbelievers which God strictly forbade. The text tells us that they intermingled the holy race or seed with that of foreign or heathen lands. That's been the downfall of God's people since nearly the beginning of time. It was always the curse of wayward Israel and has been a temptation for God's people in every age. One reason that God forbade the practice of marrying into the Gentile nations was the corrosive effect that it had upon His own people. It tempted them and often did turn their hearts away from God and they would be led off into idolatry. It happened again and again.

In this case, the spiritual leaders of Israel were some of the guiltiest and they led the whole remnant into this sin. It was a terrible state of affairs. This was after the return from captivity and you'd have thought they'd have learned their lesson. But when Zerubbabel led the first captives back to Jerusalem and their homeland, it didn't take long for them to compromise and begin to take foreign wives and plunge themselves right back into sin. About 75 years after they returned, Ezra led his delegation of some 2,000 back and he found the nation in this sad and sordid state. The Jews were a miserable lot and when Ezra found this to be so, he was overwhelmed with grief and sorrow.

Ezra 9:3-4 "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice."

Ezra was so overcome by the spiritual condition of his people and by the brazenness and gravity of their sin that he was astonished and literally sat down for much of the day and couldn't even speak. He was so overcome with emotion that he ripped his clothes, pulled his hair, and hung his head in disbelief, shame, and utter amazement.

I want you to notice how this man of God looked at sin, how he looked at the sins of God's people. This is the root of everything that we'll talk about today. Notice that Ezra didn't shrug his shoulders and go on as if nothing was wrong. He didn't pass it off as if, *You know, we're all just poor sinners and what else can you expect...* He didn't go about acting as if the people were right with God in spite of the fact that they weren't. The record says that those who actually respected and feared the word of God came to him as he sat down stunned over the sins of the nation.

Do we have that kind of reaction to sin? Or have we become accustomed to sin? Have we watered down the word of God so that we don't see sin like God sees it? Ezra considered this a grievous thing and he saw sin the way that we ALL should see sin. That's the first step in dealing with sin. One of the reasons that people don't repent of their sin today is that they don't think their sin is that big of a deal. They've been led to believe by some who water down the gospel that their sin is not that big of a deal. Friend,

you'll never see the need for a savior until you realize the seriousness of the condemnation of your own sin.

Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

Keep in mind that here in His sermon on the mount, Jesus is revealing the characteristics of heart of those who will find and enter His kingdom. He is not talking here about merely mourning over some sad affair or tragedy within our lives; He is referring to those who mourn over their sins and their estrangement from God, their spiritual condition. He says they are the ones who will be comforted because the heart that truly feels the guilt and the weight of sin will be humble enough to turn to the Lord in repentance. That's what the Lord is looking for.

Psalm 34:14-18 "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

How do you see your sin? Do you make excuses for it, rationalize it, or justify it, perhaps by the sins of others? Not Ezra. Do you minimize your sin? Not Ezra. The sin of the nation grieved him. Listen to what he said when he was finally able to speak:

Ezra 9:5-6 "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens."

He was ashamed! He couldn't even look up toward heaven. Is that how we react to sin today? We should be ashamed of our sin, especially when we should've known better, like the people here. But just like them, the sins of man today have reached up to the heavens and we ought to be ashamed of that. We ought to be ashamed of the filth and perversion that characterizes our ungodly culture today. We ought to be ashamed at the state of religion today and how far we've drifted from God; how religious people have compromised the truth and made a mockery of the word of God and have abused and perverted the grace of God. We should be ashamed at how ungrateful we've been to God and how we've lived in spite of the untold and undeserved blessings that God has heaped upon us.

Ezra 9:7-9 "Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem."

You see, they were carried off in the first place because of their sins! God was punishing them. But in His mercy, He let them return. He let a remnant return to Jerusalem and begin to rebuild the temple.

Ezra 9:10 “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments...”

That’s an incredible confession. That’s a good question for the sinner to ask of himself today: *What shall we say after this?* There really was only one thing to say and that is, in shame, godly sorrow, humility, and repentance to say to God, *We have forsaken thy commandments. We have sinned.* That’s hard to say, isn’t it? We might say it if we can generalize it and lump ourselves in with everyone else, but our pride and our self-will makes it oh so hard to say as the prophet and scribe Ezra said, *We have sinned.*

What do we say instead today? We might say, *Well, I made a mistake. I used bad judgment. I could’ve made a wiser choice. I have a weakness. I’m just a human being and, you know, we all sin from time to time.* Friend, making a mistake, using poor judgment, struggling with a weakness is not the same thing as saying as Ezra did, *We have sinned.* You see, that’s what confession looks like because that’s what God says about our sin. God doesn’t see our sin as merely a mistake; He sees it as transgression of His law, as rebellion against Him. And before God will forgive it, we have to have the humility of heart to confess it. We must have the contrition in our hearts and be of such a disposition that we are willing to humble ourselves before God and say just as Ezra said, *I have sinned.* That’s what confession looks like. What Ezra said long ago on behalf of the people, that’s what confession looks like. Remember, the word *confess* means *to agree or say the same thing.* To agree with God concerning our sin. Ezra made no excuse.

Ezra 9:15 “O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.”

He is saying, *We’re left without excuse. You’ve been good to us. You’ve shown graciousness to us in spite of our former sin. You’ve been merciful to us and look at us now. We are before thee in sin and trespass.* A true confession of sin is one that involves agreeing with what God’s word says about our behavior. The Bible does not gloss over sin, it does not sugarcoat sin, it does not water down sin or make out as though sin is not a big thing. In the eyes of God, sin is a grievous thing. If it weren’t a serious thing, why would He have sent Jesus Christ down to this earth to suffer and die? Do we really believe that Jesus came and suffered and died on the cross of Calvary just so we could splash through the blood of His cross and act like sin is not a big deal?

You see, real repentance and confession of sin involves grieving over our sin and being truly sorry for our sin. But more than that, the resolve to turn from our sin. That is where it begins if we are to find forgiveness of our sin and freedom from our sin and the guilt thereof. Ezra not only had to acknowledge the guilt of his people but God’s sovereign right to be angry and to punish them.

King David committed sin, and for a time he tried to hide it and conspired to make the most of it. But he would not get away with it, for the prophet Nathan came and told him so famously that God knew all about it. *Thou art the man.* And when David finally came to terms with what he had done and his ungodly affair with Bathsheba, his lies, his murder of an innocent man, he fell apart. He confessed his sin to God with no excuse. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, no alibi. He had no reservations. He simply poured out his broken heart to God in **Psalm 51** and it was genuine repentance.

Psalm 51:3-4 “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.”

You see, that's confession. Right there is the very textbook definition of confession. He agreed with God that what he had done was evil and he deserved God's judgment. He couldn't argue with God about it, there was no excuse and no alibi. He had done wrong and God had every sovereign right to punish him for his sin.

In the New Testament, Jesus told that famous story of a rebellious young man who ran away from his father and home to a far country to live in sin and debauchery. He defied his father and squandered his father's riches on a sinful and wasted life. When the party was over and the revelers had gone home, when sin had used him up and his life was left in shambles, this Jewish son got in such a bad shape that the only means of survival he could find was feeding swine for someone. One day--perhaps it was a hot, miserable afternoon with the stench of the pigpen nearly unbearable, the Bible says he came to himself.

Luke 15:17-21 "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

His father lovingly embraced him and seeing his repentant and contrite heart, he called for the best robe, a ring for his hand, and shoes for his feet. He killed the fatted calf and rejoiced with his family and his friends. There was no meeting in the middle; none of the father giving some and the son giving a little. No, the prodigal said, *I have sinned. It is on your terms, father. I have done wrong.* The loving father requires the same of us when we sin.

1 John 1:8-9 "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."

Confessing our sins means more than revealing our sins. God already knows our sins. We're not telling God anything when we confess our sins. He knows everything that we've done, and He knows what's in our hearts. But, you see, when we confess our sins, we're agreeing with what God has said about our behavior. John says that only if we confess our sins is He faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Have you come to terms with the sin in your life? Are you ashamed of your sin like Ezra was for the sins of the people he represented before God so long ago? Are you truly remorseful, contrite, and repentant for the life you've lived and the wrongs you've done like David? Are you honest with yourself and with God about your sin like the prodigal was with his father when sin had broken him? I hope we can learn from the example of Ezra and others about the awfulness and shame of sin, the righteousness of God. I hope we can have the same kind of attitude and heart concerning sin that these did so long ago when they came to God in brokenness and repentance. For only such humility will bring one to the Lord and only that kind of humility will the Lord accept. In fact, the Bible says that the sacrifices the Lord is looking for are a broken and contrite spirit.

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