

If we confess our sin

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- [0 : 00] Come with me this morning to the thirsty pit of John, and to words which will be very familiar to you, the words of chapter 1 and verse 9.
- And whether it's the NIV or the AV you have in front of you or any other, then it will almost certainly lead to the same, or very close to the same.
- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- Nothing, absolutely nothing, should be more highly valued by us than the forgiveness of sins.
- That God has equipped himself to forgive sins is from our point of view as sinners the most marvellous truth that God has revealed to us.
- [1 : 15] A famous Highland preacher of last century, he was one of two brothers, and today, oddly we would think, he came from the island of Varan.
- Not many godly men come out of Varan now, suppose there's still one or two. But two brothers by the name of Cook, very ordinary men in some ways, and yet very extra ordinary men in other ways, became ministers of the gospel last century.
- And were a power for good and for God throughout the highlands. And something that Archie Cook, minister of David and Inverness, said about the words of the text, something that he said about these words has come down to us in a marvellous Gaelic sermon, didn't it?
- And they have stayed in my mind since I have read them, many, many years ago. The words with which he opened his sermon, and the opening words of our sermon can be fairly important.
- You preachers remember that. The rest of you remember it too. If you lose the opening of our sermon, you often lose the whole sense of our sermon. But Archie Cook began a sermon in this way.
- [2 : 38] These words leave their every hearer without excuse for every sin that they are allowed to go, unconfessed and uncleansed and unforgiven.
- Stop the think of our text again.
- If we confess those sins, he is fearful and just to forgive us those sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- Do you believe that? And let me ask you, not just do you believe it, do you experience it? The text in a sense is very simple.
- And yet like many of the simple things that this apostle, and we love him, don't we, John? Like many of the simple things that John says.
- [4 : 16] The text is so profound. But it's difficult to preach on. I have loved this text since the day after I found Christ.
- That's 36 years ago. And I have often thought of preaching on it. And when I have attempted to prepare sermons on it, all I have been able to do is speak of facets.

facets and values of what the text holds out to us. And I'm afraid that after almost three weeks of working on this sermon, that's all I'll be able to do this morning as well.

Look at some of the facets and the values of our true set couches at the very heart of the gospel.

This is the gospel. It is the gospel that touches your life and my life, where we are, where we really are.

[5 : 39] It is the gospel as it comes to us and sets its claim upon us and makes its demands.

And all I want to do this morning is to look at our claims. And some of the values that it might demand hold out to us.

And some of the things that it asks of us. I'm going to confine my thoughts just to this. If we confess. Confession of sin.

I don't want you to forget the rest of the text. It is utterly important. But it is true that if we confess, He forgives.

That's what the text is boiled down to the simplest elements. If we confess, He forgives. That's very simple.

[6 : 40] Nothing could be easier. But behind the reality it folds out. It is the movement of God in grace. Behind it is the marvel of the cross.

The glorious passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. His death for sin. His atonement. All that had to be accomplished.

He had to ascend. And be glorified at the pleasure of the Father. Before this text could ever be written.

Ought not, He said Himself, Christ to suffer. And to enter into His glory. How humbled we should be.

That God this morning. Touches. The greatest problem. The Christian house. Now I am speaking very carefully. I am not talking about the non-Christian.

[7 : 41] How marvelous. That God's work touches. The greatest problem. Of the Christian house. In such a beautiful way.

The problem of sin. What do we do. With our sin. Ah. We speak of it. Under the sense in which the Bible. So graciously enables us to speak of it.

As our failure. Sometimes. As our weakness. Sometimes as our infirmity.

But when we call it failure. Our failure. And our weaknesses. And our infirmities. By the name that they really deserve.

We call them. Our sin. And if we confess our sin. God is faithful and just. To forgive us our sin. And I want to ask.

[8 : 47] I want to ask. This question first of all. Let us take our text. And ask. Why. Confession. Of sin. Of sin. Why.

Does God. As his people. To confess. To confess. The sin. And I want to begin. The answer. By looking. At the context. In which we find the words. It's a marvelous truth.

It's a very gracious truth. It's a very simple truth. It's easy to understand. It's almost unforgettable. If there's one text. In the whole of the writings of John. That you'll hear quoted. From pulpits. In prayer. And in sermons. And in prayer meetings.

It is this text. Do you see how it. Captivated the mind of God's people. And laid hold of their hearts. And worked itself deep down into their experience. If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. And why is that so well.

Look at. This first of all. That John has hedged. This very gracious truth. Through surroundings. With the two tongues. And two tongues. Into two tongues. And three tongues. The walk. To ten tongues.

[9 : 42] And four tongues. That's a very precious truth. To surround with two tongues. And one through prayer meetings. That's one of the writings of John. That you'll hear quoted. From pulpits and prayer. In prayer. And in sermons. And in prayer meetings.

It is this text. gracious truth around with two very solemn statements. Very, very solemn statements. Here they are. Before it he says this. If we say that we have no sins, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Now that's the first edge of all that John builds around the text. Very significant. And then he follows the text with another edge or another wall. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar. On his word, it's not in us. How carefully God himself, through his servant, has safeguarded the marvellous grace of forgiveness. And how the safeguarding, how these walls of security and safety that John has placed around the text, how deeply they emphasise the marvellous of what confession is and what confession means. Now why did John say if we say that we have no sin? I think that we are always ready to deny sin. To excuse sin. To call sin in our hearts and in our thoughts and in our lives by anything but that which denominates it as trespasses. And we must have trespass against our holy God. That's why John safeguards confession of sin. If we say that we have no sin, we're very, very ready to say it. Now, in face of that, we have to say this, that in order to confess a sin, there has to be a consciousness of sin, an awareness of sin. And a consciousness of sin is not a bad, but a good. Let me say that again. I've thought about it very carefully. An awareness and a consciousness of sin, in ultimate terms, a consciousness of sin is not a good. It is the first step in the confession of sin. What does consciousness of sin mean? It means that there's a sensitivity to God. It means that there is a sensitiveness to the holiness of God. It means that there's an enlightenment as to the requirements of God.

A sense of sin involves these things. And one of the sad things about our Western society today is this, that there is very little consciousness of sin. It tells me that there is a very low concept of God in the minds of most men. And it tells me that there is scarcely any concept of God.

God as the holy one. What a dangerous concept. It's the concept of a God. There is nothing but a caricature of the living God.

God. Whether to have no God at all. Whether to have no God at all. Than one who is nothing or little less than an idiot. Of a sinner's own imagination.

[13 : 59] view chose no longer. Truthfulphobic■trift. Life. Aidfulphobic client. In addition, to his life. Inflashment. print." In addition, he r bile■■■ straight to forgetting your truth. In addition to his life. Teach to prove to you, the essence of god has sovereignty.

It doesn't. If naAL. It's field. That's notfold. Truth. Truth. Quite ■■■, sitting in the empty, a feeling the respect won't be for a moment. Windieurspples. Wath. It isn't even a ine Turtle for avity-out. officials how you dialed the own spiritual form.

edel OMG, death, of the presence of the pen. Medal of sleep. According to ■■■■ at all this nature, sometimes its remove all of Jesus on heaven is important. presence of spiritual life. But it's a good indicator. The unconverted can be conscious of sin.

The unconverted can know conviction of sin. But there is no one who should be more sensitive to sin and its evil than the Christian believer. If sin produces, and the consciousness of sin produces no sense of pain or disquiet or of guilt, we can be almost certain that we are in a poor spiritual state. A conscience that feels no pain in the presence of sin, the Bible says is a seared conscience. But on the other hand, the conscience that draws no pleasure and finds no peace in the mercy of God and Christ is equally at fault. It's a hardened conscience.

Because the love and the mercy of God are ultimately greater realities than the one we're talking about sin. Where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. So let's not be too pessimistic.

[15 : 49] Let's not despair. We're not grappling with something that God has not himself grappled with. He has grappled with sin in Christ. Praise his name for it. That's not what I'm saying at all.

But a conscience. Conscience is not a perfect monitor. It is a monitor of moral right and moral wrong. But it needs itself to be instructed and often to be readjusted by the living Word of God.

I hear people sometimes saying. You remember Professor MacKyle's sermon on conscience here. I was thinking that night and I've been thinking often ever since that night of people that I've heard saying, Oh, but my conscience, my conscience, my conscience permitted me and my conscience allowed me.

My, you know, someone said to me just after, oh, well, my conscience didn't accuse me about a certain thing. And I said, well, brother, your conscience should have accused you. You have every need to accuse your conscience. That's how I felt. I didn't put it like that too.

But that's what I felt. If your conscience is not accusing you, MacK, you should be accusing your conscience. The conscience itself needs to be cleansed by the blood of Christ and it needs to be informed by the Word of God.

[17 : 11] And there is such a thing as a conscience void of offense before God and before man. And it's very closely wrapped up, not just with the awareness of sin, but with the confession of sin.

That's why I'm mentioning it. So, John evidently lays great stress on the importance of the awareness, the consciousness of sin.

He says, if we say that we've got no sin and that we're not wrong, we're deceiving ourselves. Now, that's the last thing a Christian should want to do.

And yet, I believe there have been periods in my own life and I believe that there have been periods in your life. If you're a Christian man or a Christian woman or a Christian boy or a Christian girl today, I believe that there have been periods in your life too when you have deceived yourself in order to allow yourself to go on in sin.

And it has taken the power of God's grace to stop the deception. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. And if we evade that, there's another aspect to it, John says.

[18 : 34] If we say that we have not sinned, we're making God a liar. And his word is not in us. It's a denial of the word of God. For example, the word says that all have sinned and come short for the glory of God.

So, we mustn't go against what our word enlightened conscience tells us, what our experience tells us, and what the word of God tells us. And I would guess that there are few Christians who are not conscious of sin.

And I would guess also that it's one of the major battles that rages in the Christian life all along the journey and the road. That's why there is such a thing as confession of sin.

And it's the first step in the forgiveness of sin.

And forgiveness is something we really need all the time. I want to go on in the second place to think about the way John here links pardon and confession together.

[19 : 57] Why does he do that? Well, in a sense, we've already been seeing our way into the answer. Why does John link pardon and confession together?

Well, he does. There can be no pardon of sin without prior confession. Necessarily so. Sin unconfessed is sin retained.

Sin unconfessed and unacknowledged is sin condoned. If you as a Christian believer have not this morning been confessing your sin to God, there's a very real sense in which you're condoning it.

Sin unconfessed and sin covered or veiled over, to use the scriptural term, that's where the whole idea of Adonement comes from.

Sin veiled or covered over is really sin allowed. And sin allowed is sin loved to some extent. In fact, it is sin loved.

[21 : 04] At that point, more than God himself is loved. That's why God links pardon with confession. Now, unconfessed sin, I'm going through that very quickly.

Unconfessed sin is sin condoned, veiled, and to some extent loved. But sin confessed is something very different.

There's perhaps no better illustration in the whole of the Bible about the blessing that sin confessed brings immediately into the experience than we have in Psalm 32 that we were singing.

Remember it. Here was sin unconfessed. When as I did, refrain my speech, and silent was my tongue, my bones then waxed old.

Now, even in the English of the 17th century, you can feel the power of that. Somebody so much under the burden of sin that his bones will hardly bear it up.

[22 : 15] My bones then waxed old because I roared all day long. Sin became a painful thing for them. That was sin unconfessed.

And then you move on in just two verses. That was verse 3. And by verse 5, you get the psalmist from a different perspective altogether. What did he do? I will confess, he said.

I will confess unto the Lord. My trespasses said I, and of my sin I will freely didst forgive the iniquity.

And we're so ready to deny our sin, even to ourselves. But God ties confession and pardon together.

I was thinking through this week, I almost took it as my text, but I couldn't quite get away from this one. I was thinking of the marvellous thing an old prophet said, denominating God as a God ready to pardon.

[23 : 22] I want you to stop and think about that word, ready. God ready to pardon. I was saying to myself through the week, what does ready mean? Walking over Buckford Hill, I was thinking, it means that God has equipped himself to pardon.

He's ready to pardon. Why? Because he's equipped. He's got Christ and the insignia of the suffering of Christ before the eye all the time.

He's as a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And I was thinking too, that he's not only equipped to pardon, he's very quick to pardon.

The word ready, the word that's translated ready, means somebody who's almost on the move. He's so ready that there's no halting or hesitation or dithering, but he's ready to pardon immediately and instantaneously.

That's a marvelous thought. I must say my heart was thrilled. The other day when I thought of a God who was ready to pardon the moment, I confessed my sin.

[24 : 35] And that's the God who is your God and my God. That's the gospel. If that's not the gospel, I don't know the gospel. And if that's not the very root and half to salvation, I don't know what salvation is.

But there it is, a God ready to pardon. But listen, the same God I have to remember is a God who also refuses to pardon. He refuses to pander to sin and he refuses to pardon sin that is unconfessed.

Unless there's confession, no pardon. Oh, you see, and man today says this all the time. It's been said to me a myriad times as a minister. In hospitals, even on deathbeds, it's been said to me, surely I'll be all right because God is a God of love.

Look what he's done for the world, given his son. And I knew that the people had no idea what the costly love of God is. And I would say, yes, God is a God of love.

But God is also the God of perfect righteousness and of holiness. And he says that he will by no means clear the guilty until the guilty come to the only means of atonement and forgiveness that there is under heaven.

[26 : 07] That's the gospel. And what about it? Why? Why do we think a refusing God, a God who refuses to pardon, is harsh and awful? Do you know what that God is doing?

who refuses to pardon the sin that a man refuses to confess? Do you know what he's doing? He's taking that man at his own evaluation.

And he's dealing with that man's sin at the man's own evaluation of his sin. If it's not worth for confessing, then God says it's not worth forgiving.

Perhaps that's harsh. Perhaps that sounds very tough. But that's the equation, my friend. When I get silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

For day and night thine hand was heavy upon me. The God who refuses to pardon acts in perfect harmony with the man who refuses to confess.

[27 : 12] Is that not so? The God who is ready to pardon, on the other hand, acts in perfect harmony with the man who is ready to confess.

Yes, there's a work of the Spirit behind that. Of course there is. Taken at the human level. This is the value. The God who refuses to pardon refuses only to pardon a man who refuses to confess.

And the God who is ready to pardon pardons only the man who is ready to confess his need of pardon. And finally, let's take confession and look at it as a revelation of an inward attitude.

Now remember the way we've come. We've been asking why confession? Then we've been seeing that God has linked confession and pardon together. And now, quickly, let's look at this. Confession is a revelation of inward attitude.

Now that's very important because God regards the heart. It doesn't matter what falderals or attitudes or so on you go through in your worship and in your devotions and here in church.

[28 : 38] You can sit in the seat and look like a saint. And I can stand here and look like a saint too. But what matters is the inward and this is where confession begins.

Now think of the confession referred to here. If we confess our sins. Now for the first time in many, many years this week I look to the Greek word that underlies the word confess.

And I discovered something that I had never realized before. the word is not the usual word in the New Testament for confession. It's a word that's used very frequently in other connections.

And it simply means this. If we admit or if we acknowledge or if we take something at its true value. This is what John is saying.

If we admit our sins if we acknowledge our sins then he forgives our sins. Now where does the admission of sin begin?

[29 : 48] To whom do you to whom must you first of all admit your sin? And this is absolutely this word is absolutely it closes off forever. So many commentators talk about Christians confessing their sins to one another.

That's a whole lot of nonsense. And many commentators take it from this very verse. John is not talking about confessing Christians confessing their sins to one another in order to be forgiven.

I doubt if the Bible ever talks about that. Maybe in some places it hints at it. But John is saying admit sin. To whom must we first of all admit our sin? To ourselves.

If we say that we have no sin but if we admit that we have sinned. If we say that we have not sinned if we admit that we have sinned.

Do you see it? If we admit and it's first of all to ourselves. The admission referred to is not that. of relationship to anyone else initially but to oneself.

[30 : 59] I wanted to use a very simple illustration at least I hope it's a very simple illustration it was in my mind through the days of this week. I was thinking that if I had to confess a lie to one of you in my congregation there are two ways in which I could do it.

or there are two ways in which I could talk about it. There is really only one way in which I could confess it. I would come to you and I would say I lied to you yesterday.

Now I can be stating a truth there but I am not confessing a sin. but if I come to you and I say yesterday I sinned by telling you a lie.

I am not only making a statement of truth I am making a confession of sin. I am evaluating the lie that it's worth before God.

And you don't need to think necessarily of a lie. Any sin that's true of. Boasting I boasted yesterday. What is boasting? It's a slur against the majesty of God.

[32 : 27] I lost my temper. Well just now I am very emotional. I have been through operations and all these sort of things you know. It's very easy to state a truth and not confess a sin.

I have no business to lose my temper with my Christian brethren. Even if I do feel very emotional and unstable at times.

Oh you'll think your minister's going to pieces. He's not really. You can put yourself into his shoes I hope. But you know how ready we are to make statements that are not confessions.

Under context I have to come back to that. If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves. Now that's what hardened gospel hearers do say to themselves.

I'll never forget a night in Aberdeen visiting somebody who had been coming to church for all the years and hearing a variety of preachers. And boy I was finding him very difficult to get close to on spiritual things.

[33 : 40] To get down to the nitty gritty. He would talk about anything in the world except spiritual things to me. And at last I said to him I was wondering coming up to drive your house tonight.

I was wondering better not say his name. I was wondering if you ever thought of yourself as a sinner. Oh my goodness no Mr. McMillan said oh no no I'm not that kind of person.

No. Man has said you're unique in all of Aberdeen. You're not that kind of person. And yet that's the way we tend to feel.

So easy for us to say no sin. Confession is realistic in its base.

And you know the fact that God has died pardoned and forgives us together shows his marvellous knowledge of us.

[34 : 41] This is great psychology. This is great spiritual psychology. Because psychologists tell us today that if there are deep and hidden things which trouble us and they will the only way to deal with them is to bring them out into the open.

And talk about them and face them. Now I believe that that's based on the nature of man. And I believe it's based in gospel truth.

And I believe that this is the way God deals with us. He will not allow sin to fester and be a sore in the heart and life of his people whom he loves very dearly.

but he will have them by his grace. Look at it honestly and deal with it biblically. And this is the truth.

If we confess our sins then he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. And you don't have to wait. He does it immediately.

[35 : 48] Right here in the congregation all you have to do is hold it out first of all to your own eye and then hold it out to his eye and say Lord I'm sorry.

And in the sorry itself you're already enjoying the forgiveness of a gracious God. and forgiveness brings peace with it and joy unspeakable.

That's why a Christian man and a Christian woman is a happy person. Let us pray. O Lord we confess our sinfulness and the folly that attaches to it we can understand the psalmist who said long ago so foolish was I and ignorant I was as a beast before thee.

But we thank thee O God for enlightening grace and we thank thee for everlasting truth. We thank thee that when we take our sin which is sin no matter how we feel about it and look at it honestly in the light of thy word and bring it out to thee and confess it and turn from it and repent with angrily that then O Lord we know thy pardon and forgiveness.

Grant that thy children here would know not only ongoing pardon but ongoing cleansing from all their sin and grant that any person amongst us who has never yet confessed sin or turned from sin may today come under the power of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Truth and be brought to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing.

[37 : 58] We ask it in his name. Amen.